GRENDEL vs. BATMAN!

A CONVERSATION WITH CREATOR
MATT WAGNER
FROM MAGE TO
THE DARK KNIGHT
AND BEYOND!

GROUP
GRENDEL
A TALK WITH
THE TEAM

TEEN TURTLES
ADVENTURES
A TALK WITH THE OTHER TEAM

#83

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

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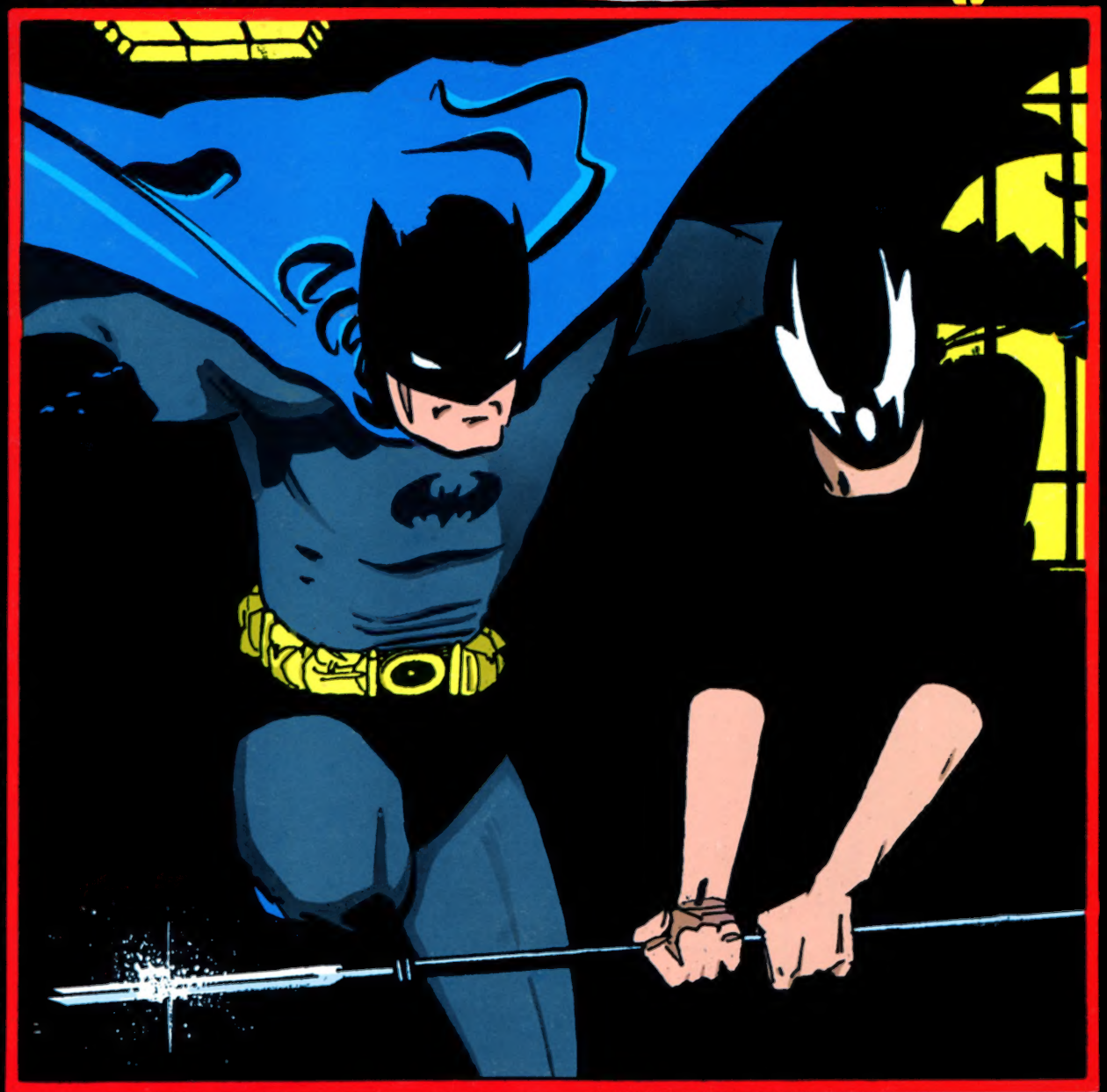

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UP FRONT

Back when **Steve Gerber** wrote MAN-THING for Marvel, a small Florida village called Citrusville was the nexus — of practically everything. In real life, however, the nexus is a small Georgia village called Clayton.

How do I know? I spend a lot of time there — on Screamer Mountian.

I came to the area to take over the editing of a magazine, following in the footsteps of **Don Pendleton**, then unknown but now practically a brand name in men's adventure books through the creation of his character, The Executioner.

Since then, I, too, have gone to other things — editing and scripting comics for Marvel, DC and others, writing paperbacks, and TV scripts and, of course, publishing — but I always return to the nexus.

It was in out-of-the-way, off-the-beaten-track Clayton that I met actor (and comics fan) **David Carradine** — and learned that one of his favorite comic characters is a creation of mine: Lunatik, from the pages of THE DEFENDERS. He was filming THE LONG RIDERS here. Turns out a fair number of movies have been shot in Clayton — DELIVERANCE, THE GREAT LOCOMOTIVE CHASE, GRIZZLY, etc.

Actor **Burt Reynolds** owns a place up the road. Science fiction and fantasy artists **Ron** and **Val Lakey Lindahn** live only miles away. The Cabbage Patch Kids king **Xavier Roberts**, houses operations a short drive away — and a slightly further drive brings you to adventure writers **Jerry** and **Sharon Ahern** or, in a different direction, celebrated SF author **Sharon Webb.**

But perhaps the bigger surprise of late was the discovery that world traveller and comics alumnus **Dan Barry** (who has produced the FLASH GORDON syndicated strip longer than most of us have lived) is now settled only 20 miles away. Dan drew the very earliest original adventure of AIRBOY.

Coincidence? No. Clayton really *is* the nexus — not Citrusville.

-Dave

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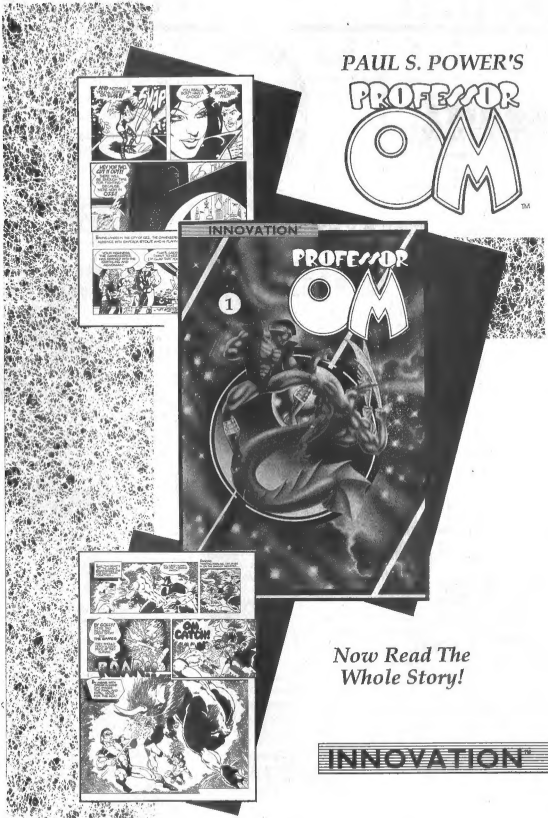
PAUL S. POWER'S
PROFESSOR
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OH, CATCH!
Now Read The
Whole Story!
INNOVATION

"GRENDEL TALES will take up where my series ends."

MATT WAGNER

When I got the assignment to interview Matt Wagner about the BATMAN/GRENDEL crossover, and his work in general, I realized I hadn't really kept up with Grendel since the character's appearance as a backup in MAGE some years ago. I called Matt to set up the interview and he graciously offered to send me the complete GRENDEL run from his personal files. That's a mark of the man's personality, I think — a personality that shines through in this discussion . . .

PATRICK DANIEL O'NEILL: *Having read through the entirety of GRENDEL now . . .*

MATT WAGNER: . . . it's different from how you remember it, isn't it?

PAT: . . . *I have a basic question. If Grendel is essentially a spirit of aggression, was Hunter Rose really the* first *Grendel or merely the first person recorded to be touched by that spirit?*

MATT: Well, he was the first person recorded in this sequence. We have a new series coming out eventually called GRENDEL TALES, which will take up from where my GRENDEL series ends — #50 — and I've gotten some proposals

Here and throughout this interview: Artwork from the Batman/Grendel project — artwork by Matt Wagner.

Batman & THE DEMON, TM & ©1990 DC Comics Inc. / Grendel ©1990 Matt Wagner / Sketchbook material ©1990 Matt Wagner / THE AERIALIST ©1990 Matt Wagner.

"We're covering a time period of some 15,000 years for

Character sketch by Matt.

for stories about Grendels from the past. I just got one about a Grendel in ancient Rome, and it works just great! So maybe I'll start a whole new series about Grendels from the past — I have no idea what that would be called yet.

Yeah, I consider that Hunter Rose was not the first, *per se*, and I intend to take the series further and further into the future until we hit some sort of cyclical warp and come back to the past. That's probably when I will take an active role in writing and drawing the series again — to tell the tale of Beowulf and Grendel, which is legendarily the primordial act of aggression. Symbolically, it's almost exactly the same as Cain and Abel.

So far as Grendel being a spirit of aggression: It's more than that — it's a sociological phenomenon. Brian Li Sung saw it as a spirit of aggression; the phenomenon manifests itself as the inhabitant perceives it. Christine saw it as a tool and a curse; Brian saw it as possessing him. Hunter, of course, with typical Hunter ego, considered it self-generated.

In the GRENDEL TALES series, which will pick up following the Orion Assante storyline (in which the military elite are called Grendels), we will have a situation in which the term "Grendel" is synonymous with "samurai" or "knight." That gives me the opportunity to step back from writing it — I won't be writing GRENDEL TALES — which enables anybody to come in and do their own version of Grendel, without me having to really worry about continuity. If it's a sociological phenomenon, then there can be lots of Grendels running around all over the place, and there's an infinite variety available. We're covering a time period of some 1500 years for GRENDEL TALES, there's a lot of room for variety there.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Matt Wagner
Born: Central Pennsylvania
Current Home: The Bay Area of California
Education: James Madison University; Philadelphia College of Art
Credits: MAGE, GRENDEL, DEMON mini-series, forthcoming Batman/Grendel crossover
Description of Batman/Grendel: "A dream project"

GRENDEL TALES, there's a lot of room for variety."

PAT: *Will you be editing or coordinating GRENDEL TALES?*

MATT: My official title is, I guess, creative director. I'm also doing covers on the first 12, just to ensure . . .

PAT: . . . *marketability.*

MATT: Yes. *(Laughter.)* Although I think it's going to be quite a hit. The first team on it will be **James Robinson,** who writes LONDON'S DARK for Escape, and a new young fellow named **Philip Bond,** who's done some work for A1. They'll be doing the first six; I think it's going to be quite a hit. **Eddie Campbell** is doing three issues after that — I'm mondo thrilled about that.

PAT: *I want to talk a little about how you came up with this concept — when you started GRENDEL with Hunter Rose . . .*

MATT: . . . it wasn't this far-sighted.

PAT: *I got that feeling. When did the final version of GRENDEL really jell for you?*

MATT: First, a little history about me and Comico:

I originally met the people who formed Comico while we were in college at the Philadelphia College of Art. We used to produce an underground tabloid called DUCK WORKS, which was full of school news and duck cartoons. They dropped out of school to produce COMICO PRIMER #1, a primitive black-and-white anthology. They asked me to do a ten-page story for the second issue; so I started coming up with some ideas.

At that point, before the big wave of dark heroes had hit the mainstream, I thought it would be interesting to have the main character be the villain instead of the hero. I wanted a certain ironic dichotomy — the villain would be dashing and attractive, while the hero would be grotesque and brutal.

The early black-and-white GRENDEL was done in an extremely cartoony

I must say, he did manage to retain most of his calm. He shivered and sweat, of course, but he didn't thrash about or start to scream uncontrollably. Not yet.
P-P-PLEASE, W-WHAT DO YOU WANT? MY WIFE IS...
FAST, FAST ASLEEP.
AND UNLIKELY TO DISTURB US AS WE TALK. YOU WILL TALK TO ME, WON'T YOU, LENNY? TRUTHFULLY, YES?
YES, OF COURSE, WHATEVER YOU-

"I was very influenced by Japanese animation at the time."

style. I was very influenced by Japanese animation at the time — thank God I lost that quick, because I see that as a dead end, repeating other people's motifs. Argent, the wolf-character, was done in a scratchy, rougher style. He was toned with Zip-a-Tone, too, to further pull him away from the rest of the world of the strip.

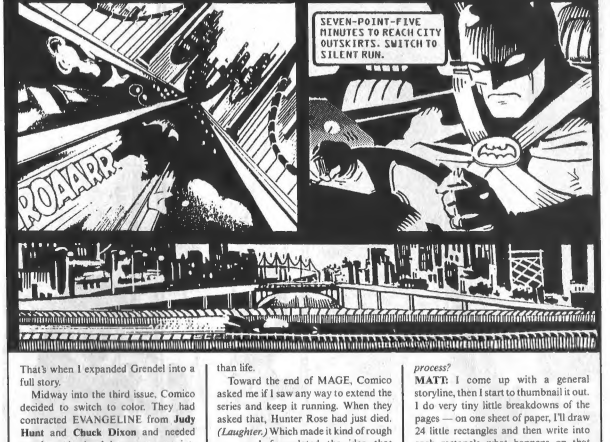
One Christmas I started developing some mask designs — what I was shooting for was an evil harlequin; something that verged on looking silly and yet was terrifying at the same time. I wanted a mocking attitude. Out of 10 or 12 designs, the one I ended up was, I thought, the simplest and the most expressive. Some of them had eyebrows, big gaping grins. Eventually, I found — with just the two slashes through the eyes — I could get the feeling of both horns and tusks. Then popping that little clown nose in the middle gave it the digression that I was looking for.

The first Grendel story was a 10-pager in COMICO PRIMER #2 (the cover story). Then the publishers decided they would branch off four characters into their own books: the three characters created by the owners plus Grendel.

--SIP--
EXCUSE ME...
YES?
YOU SEEM TO HAVE GOT BEH MY RED WINE, AND I HAVE YOUR...SIP...
YOUR GINGER ALE.
SORRY.
NICE CLUB, THIS. YOU A MEMBER?
SEVEN GENERATIONS.
HM. MY, I'M THE GUESS OF A MEMBER, MYSELF. NORMAN SOMINGS?
SORRY, NO. I DON'T COME HERE MUCH. WHAT DO YOU DO FOR ME SOMING?
I'M A WRITER, FROM OUT OF TOWN. AND I LOVE A GOOD CLUB. YOU?
A WRITER WOULD CALL ME ONE OF THE IDLE RICH. I INHERITED YOUNG.
WELL, I'M FAIRLY IDLE AS WELL AT THE MOMENT, AND I STARTED YOUNG.
SO I SEE. BUT YOU MUST EXCUSE ME NOW. I'M HERE FOR A MEETING, AND I'M ALREADY LATE...
YES, I'M HERE FOR ONE AS WELL. SORRY, BUT WAYNE...?
WAYNE. BRUCE WAYNE.
AND YOU ARE...?
HUNTER. HUNTER ROSE.

BUT IF YOU INSIST-- WE'LL TAKE THE MONEY, TOO. Heh.
I AM NOT HERE FOR EITHER YOUR MONEY OR YOUR LIFE.
HEH. Heh, Heh.. HYUNGH!
ALTHOUGH I COULD EASILY BE PERSUADED CONCERNING THE LATTER.
H-AGH!

"So far, I have never worked full-script."



That's when I expanded Grendel into a full story.

Midway into the third issue, Comico decided to switch to color. They had contracted EVANGELINE from **Judy Hunt** and **Chuck Dixon** and needed another color book because gang printing would reduce their costs. They asked me to do one. That's how I developed MAGE. At that point, I pretty much left Grendel behind. MAGE was all personal fantasy and allegory and Grendel wasn't turning out to be a grand financial success for me. Then I started getting complaints from people who wanted to know how Grendel's story ended. At that point, I revamped it into the style you see in the "Devil by the Deed" graphic novel.

PAT: *The more illustrated story as opposed to straight-forward comic book?*

MATT: Right. The reason for that was it was originally serialized as a four-page back-up in the last eight issues of MAGE. Since I only had four pages, I had to come up with a way to fit more story into a smaller amount of space. The normal panel-and-balloon breakdown wouldn't have allowed for that much action in the space of four pages.

In addition, it helps you to distance yourself from the characters. In **Alan Moore's** introduction, he makes the point that they almost become hieroglyphics . . . that the artwork furthers that image; they become grander than life.

Toward the end of MAGE, Comico asked me if I saw any way to extend the series and keep it running. When they asked that, Hunter Rose had just died. *(Laughter.)* Which made it kind of rough . . . so I formulated the idea that Hunter's ward, Stacy, would eventually have a daughter by very violent means. That set up this generational idea of Grendel.

That's not the first time this has been done. **Lee Falk** set that up in THE PHANTOM. But there's not much change there. The Phantom looks the same, down to the same chin line, in every incarnation.

PAT: *There are strong genetics in that Walker family, I'll tell you.* (Laughter.)

MATT: Inbreeding. *(Laughter.)*

Basically, the only way I saw to do a continuing open-ended GRENDEL series that wouldn't get boring for me was to make it a continuing series of *limited* series. Each time we change the art team and story direction, it should change dramatically in all respects: in story-telling style, in mood, in appearance, in presentation. You have this single cohesive link and yet it's open to experimentation every time.

PAT: *Let's go into your working methods in the various ways you've handled GRENDEL.*

When you're writing and penciling and inking it yourself, what's your process?

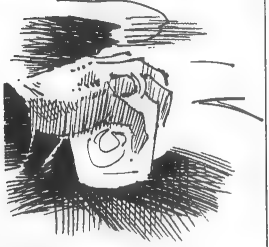
MATT: I come up with a general storyline, then I start to thumbnail it out. I do very tiny little breakdowns of the pages — on one sheet of paper, I'll draw 24 little rectangles and then write into each rectangle what happens on that page. Then, it's a matter of breaking it down visually.

So far, I have never worked full-script, either for myself or with another artist. I find that seeing the character realized and visualized will suggest a whole lot more to me than just an ethereal thought. Seeing the character's face suggests slang, the character's past and that's how I work for myself: I draw the story and then go back and script it.

Working with other artists, I start with a plot; I'm an artist, too. I'm not just a writer and if I wanted to have that tight, tight **Alan Moore**-type of control over what was going on, I should be drawing it, too. There's no reason for me to work with an artist, unless I'm providing him with a free opportunity to express himself and .o put something new into the situation that I wouldn't necessarily have come up with. I work in varying degrees of looseness, depending on how comfortable I am working with the artist.

For instance, I remember one instance in the **Snyder-Geldhof** run, where the plot said simply, "Chase scene — have fun!" *(Laughter.)* Because I knew these guys were strong story-tellers and they

Here and next page: Work from the sketch book of Matt Wagner.



Bruce on phone

Hillie

"The image of Batman as homophobe didn't work for me."

were very in tune with the characters and they wouldn't do anything out of character. That only lasted a few pages; I didn't tell them "Fill in the rest of the book."

I try to provide the artist with the opportunity for him to have a real impact on the book. It's the only reason for me to work with other artists.

PAT: *I did an interview with a writer about working with Gene Colan and they said they got to a point where they simply told Gene what the starting point in the issue was, this is the major thing that must happen in this issue, and this is where we want to end up.* (Laughter.) *He'd just give it to Gene and he'd pencil it. Of course, sometimes Gene would get carried away and spend too much space on a section he really liked, then realize he only had four or five pages to wrap it up!*

MATT: Somebody just told me there are some Gene Colan ARCHIES on the stands right now.

PAT: *Yes, there are.*

MATT: Do you know which ones?

PAT: *I think they're in the BETTY AND VERONICA bunch, but I'm not sure.*

The nice thing is that Archie is giving credits on the stories now, so you can find the artists you're looking for.

MATT: I'm tentatively slated to do some covers for an upcoming Archie series, called ARCHIE GROWS UP, a three-issue prestige series, written by **Robert Loren Fleming . . .**

PAT: *That is neat.*

MATT: . . . They approached me in San Diego — and the opportunity to draw those nostalgic characters I couldn't pass up.

PAT: *They are archetypes, aren't they?*

It's fascinating that the Archie company has realized that, without getting into super-heroes, they can still attract the hard-core fan audience, simply by employing the right people. And even with the people who have been turning out Archie stories for years, they're giving them names! *People can say, "Oh, he's the guy who draws them* well! *This is the guy who writes the* funny *stuff!"*

Or by ringing in new variations, as with the book you're working on. They ran a preview in CBG of a title called EXPLORERS OF THE UNKNOWN, in which they've taken the standard Archie cast and re-cast them as a set of adventurers. I looked at it and said, "This is great; this is fun! It's as if the Archie cast were just actors making INDIANA JONES movies!"

MATT: You're even seeing that at DC, where they're starting to realize that these major characters can be used in different ways. They're archetypes and they're most special when the reader can see how each artist or writer perceives them.

PAT: *It would be fun if DC did a Superman story like Batman's GOTHAM BY GASLIGHT. Say, a Superman story placed in the '20s . . .*

MATT: . . . That'd be great — or even in the '40s, where he worked much better

PAT: *Speaking of Batman . . . where do things stand with your Batman/Grendel project?*

MATT: It's a dream project . . .

PAT: *Where in the history of Grendel is this taking place? Is the Hunter Rose Grendel?*

MATT: Yes, it is.

Interestingly enough, this is the second version of this story I typed up. I gave DC a long, extended plot, because working with them — and most especially with Batman — everything has to be spelled out by the letter. In the original version, Grendel didn't exist *per se* in Batman's world — he was more a social phenomenon: Grendel comics, Grendel movies, etc; and one character became obsessed with Grendel and turned into him. First, **Diana Schutz,** my editor, and then **Denny O'Neil** said it was clunky and contrived and too long, because I had to go through the mechanics of getting this character into the mask. I heartily agreed with them: That was one part of it I didn't like either.

Then, Diana suggested, "Use Hunter Rose." He's pretty much the living antithesis of Bruce Wayne. They're both urbane, witty, they both tend to wear black. Bruce is publicly perceived as sort of the failed aristocracy, while Hunter is the rabid bourgeois. Batman is a more mature, fully functioning adult

PAT: *Depending on your interpretation of Batman's psychology . . .*

MATT: I don't tend to agree with this current move on to always show Batman as losing his shit. That doesn't make sense to me. He's a functioning machine: He's nuts, but by channeling that insanity into the bat costume and into this grand crusade, he manages his sanity. That's how he works and it's why, in DARK KNIGHT, when he finally goes off his

nut at the end and kills the Joker, it's so signficant.

For instance, in ARKHAM ASYLUM, the image of Batman as a homophobe just didn't work for me.

Anyway, Grendel is much more pushing it to the limit every time he steps out of the room. He's inwardly *hoping* someone's going to bring him down; he thinks they can't. He's challenging the world to bring him down.

PAT: *Which, in a way, makes him similar to a lot of classic Batman villains . . . who exist to challenge Batman.*

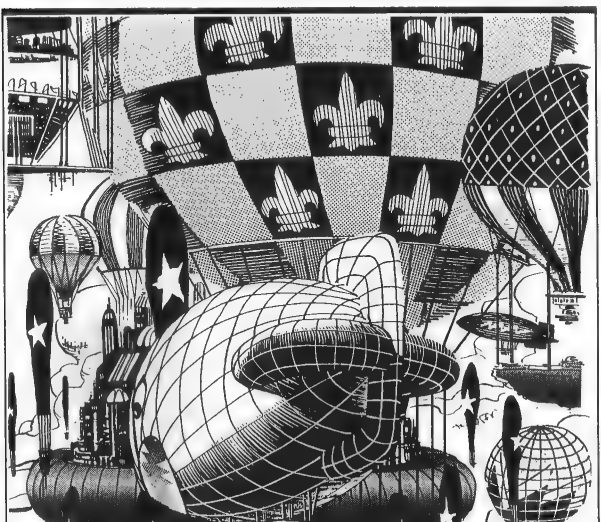
MATT: Definitely. As I'm going through, I'm realizing his similarities to the Joker. He's not that chaotic, he's not totally off-the-wall insane, but he's certainly that amoral.

PAT: *Doing a little philosophizing here, you can almost picture Batman as a spirit of righteous vengeance — if you think about what he exists for — opposed to Grendel's spirit of aggression without purpose.*

MATT: It's almost righteous vengeance opposed to the Yuppie ideal — experience for the sake of experience, sensual excess.

Storyline-wise, when Diana suggested using Hunter Rose, it didn't mesh for me

"I went to a liberal arts school called James Madison



"The Aerialist" — Upcoming lead feature in DARK HORSE PRESENTS.

at first, because the Grendels (and Hunter Rose especially) tend to keep notes and journals. Why wouldn't we have heard of his encounter with Batman befor.? How, after encountering Batman, does he go back to Argent the Wolf and still find such a fascinating opponent".

I finally realized that Batman was too much a disturbing reflection of himself. Whereas Argent is really an antithesis in every way brutish, not even human — Batman and Grendel are very similar. I found a period in the Hunter Rose tale — where he tricks Argent into failing through the giant skylight at a public event and Argent goes into hiding for a few months — and Grendel's bored. There are no challenges. He has an offer from a publishing house in Gotham City and hears about a deal going down there that he can mess with — and he thinks it would be fun to screw around with Batman for awhile; so he comes to Gotham.

It all started to mesh together really well. When it came time to write these characters, I found that they are *so* grandiose, *so* archetypal, that it was hard to get into their humanity. I had to give them some human bearings. I did that by including two female characters who are roommates — one becomes involved with Hunter Rose and the other with Bruce Wayne. Their comparisons and contrasts support and define the comparisons of Batman and Grendel. Once I had that starting block, then I found I could invest some humanity into Hunter Rose and Bruce Wayne.

PAT: *I want to talk a little about the business genesis of this project. How did it get started?*

MATT: It began about two years before it was ever written down. Needless to say, the legal end of it was a sheer nightmare. Basically, it started over a couple of drinks at a party between **Phil Lasorda**, publisher of Comico, and **Bruce Bristow,** DC's sales and marketing VP. We kept pushing it and pushing it, 'til it happened. They had attempted a couple of Batman crossovers in the past — an ill-fated one with Judge Dredd (DC has since an-

University as an art major — I got experience."

nounced that the BATMAN/JUDGE DREDD crossover *will* appear at some point) and an ill-fated one with Jon Sabic. At several points in the game, it seemed like this one would collapse as well. Finally, we had ink on paper and I was given the go-ahead to start.

PAT: *To your knowledge, did the distribution relationship between Comico and DC aid in it coming to reality?*

MATT: I don't know that for sure, but I can't see why it didn't. It sure makes sense. I do know that the negotiations for the distribution deal solidified in the midst of the negotiations for Batman/Grendel and that the contracts for this were put on hold until the distribution deal was finalized.

PAT: *It's public knowledge that Comico is in financial trouble, including having filed for Chapter 11 reorganization. Without talking about anything that may jeopardize your own rights and situation, where does that put the BATMAN/GRENDEL project?*

MATT: It's hard to say, because it's hard to say what Comico's future is at this point. Statistically, 90 to 95 percent of the people who go into Chapter 11 never come out of it. DC — without putting words in their mouth — seem to be behind the BATMAN/GRENDEL project and seem to be willing to continue it, regardless of Comico's case.

That's about all I want to get into over that. We're near completion on the art and story; that's good news.

PAT: *Let's examine your personal history: Where were you born? Where did you die? Where did you grow up?*

MATT: *(Laughter.)* I was born in central Pennsylvania, stayed there for a while, then spent the bulk of my youth shuttling up and down the middle portion of the East Coast.

PAT: *Under what circumstances?*

MATT: My father kept getting transferred due to his job. I didn't hit the road alone or anything.

I'd always been interested in comics and always wanted to do them. I was introduced to comics — let's see, how? — probably through cartoons on TV, coupled with the fact that my mother was an English teacher and really stressed reading to me. I had an aptitude for art at a young age and so I wanted to read comic books, so she said, "Fine, just as long as you're reading."

PAT: *That's interesting: an English teacher who didn't object to comics.*

MATT: She probably thought, "This is a phase he'll grow out of as his interests expand." She had no idea that the market in the artform would expand as my interest expanded. At this point, my parents understand it's no longer a phase.

PAT: *You're earning a good living at it — how can they object?*

MATT: In addition, I've been on TV a few times, I just did a lecture in West Virginia that they got to go to — the first time they'd ever seen me in a public situation, they were pretty jazzed on that — they know there's a fair amount of honor I've accrued in the field, in addition to making good bucks.

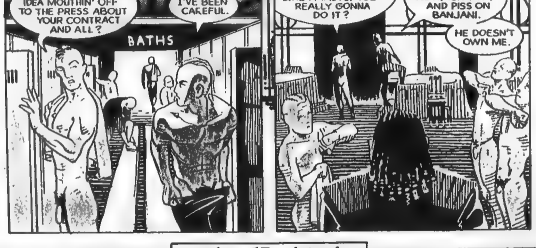
PAT: *Where did you do your arts studies?*

MATT: We were living in Virginia and I went to a liberal arts school called James Madison University as an art major for a couple of years. That's where I got my first experience in publication. I did a semi-weekly comic strip for the campus newspaper, and I was the graphics editor, which amounted to, on press night, going to the office and — in the space of several hours — crank out all the spot illustrations. *(Laughter.)*

That taught me deadlines; I know how to produce now. Too many artists sit around and piddle at it and piddle at it . . . I had a certain amount of that in me — but this showed me what the reality of producing artwork was like.

Then I decided I wanted to go to an art school and I transferred to the Philadelphia College of Art, where I met the guys who eventually formed Comico — **Gerry Giovinco** and **Bill Cuccinata,** neither of whom are really with the company anymore. Gerry is still listed as an owner, but really doesn't have a hand in the functioning of the company. I lasted there two and a half years, dropping out while I was doing MAGE and GRENDEL. I decided I was making money and the school wasn't teaching me anything about doing comics. The last several years of art school — in the commercial field, anyway — are just fine-tuning the portfolio and teaching you how to present yourself to art directors. I really didn't feel I needed that, so I dropped out.

PAT: *I'm going to tell you a secret: I was the managing editor of COMICS SCENE when the first Comico titles came out and we were running a column called "Pick Hits,' in which I chose what I thought were the best titles coming out. When I saw the first set of Comico titles — with the possible exception of yours; I don't remember if it was in there — I turned to the editor, Bob Greenberger, and said, "Gee, I wish we had a 'Bottom*


YOU SURE IT'S SUCH A GOOD IDEA MOUTHIN' OFF TO THE PRESS ABOUT YOUR CONTRACT AND ALL?
I'VE BEEN CAKEFUL.
BATHS
STILL, BANJANI'S GOTTA BE STEAMIN' LIKE A VALVE, YOU REALLY GONNA DO IT?
THAT'S THE BIG QUESTION NOW, ISN'T IT? AND PISS ON BANJANI.
HE DOESN'T OWN ME.

"I missed the X-MEN thing that everybody finds so great."

of the Barrel' column."

What's the one I remember — Adge, or something like that?

MATT: AZ — that was done by **Phil Lasorda**, the owner.

PAT: *So, it was surprising, four or five years later, to see Comico doing material that anyone actually wanted to buy.*

When you were reading comics as a kid, what were the things you followed, the things you were impressed with?

MATT: I used to love the DCs, because they were self-contained stories. I hated Marvel, because you had to keep buying them. This is pretty ironic, considering the stuff I'm doing now.

I liked the big three characters — Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman. My mother bought me my comics; any comic I wanted I could pretty much have. She used to buy me lots of the CLASSICS ILLUSTRATEDs, so I knew comics could do more than just super-heroes. As I said, my initial attraction was through cartoons, so I knew there was a humorous vein as well.

The first thing I really remember affecting me as being ingenious was when I discovered the Warren black-and-white SPIRIT. I just couldn't believe — it seemed far above anything being done at the time

Then I kind of lost interest in comics for a while . . . maybe because I was living in Virginia in a fairly rural community, so I was removed from any opportunity to get anything except what showed up on the newsstand. I missed the whole X-MEN thing that everybody seems to find so great.

Then I went to the art school, which tended to frown upon comics. For a while, I was going to be a "real" artist. Then the fellows I did DUCK WORKS with introduced me to **Frank Miller's** work . . . and that revitalized my interest. Plus, I had access to comic-book stores and was able to begin learning about the small press — you didn't have to take just whatever the Big Two were ramming down your throat. I had an even further expansion when I discovered Japanese comics. Here were comics in which you could perceive the story without having to read the language.

Several years ago, when I met my wife, who's Canadian, we moved to Montreal and I suddenly had access to French bookstores, that carried every European graphic album you could conceive of. That's kind of the evolution of my interest in comics.

I realize, too, that it's a continuing evolution. I try to keep my mind open on the subject.

PAT: *I spent six months at Pratt Institute here in New York and had the same experience you did about art schools and*

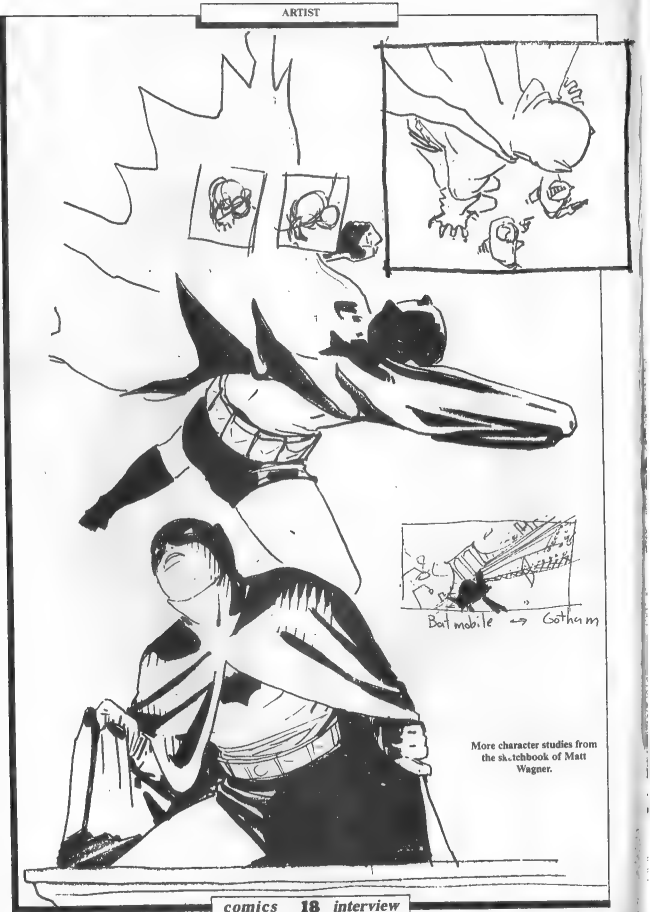
The unpublished cover illustration to DC's DEMON series, Book 1. The cover was rejected for reasons unknown.

DC COMICS INC. **SPARTA**

Wagner '96
Nichols

DEMON #1 (limited series) PENCILER: MATT WAGNER. INKER: ART NICHOLS

BRAD NO. | INVEN-TORY NO | CODE SYMBOL | MONTH



More character studies from the sketchbook of Matt Wagner.

"I'm working on an erotic graphic novel now."

comics: "*You want to do what? Why do you want to do that? They're not very good . . .*"

MATT: The medium has evolved now that you can drop something in their hands and say, "Bullshit! Here's MAUS - read it. Here's LOVE AND ROCKETS — read it." There's an infinite variety of stuff for them to look at. The skeptics are diminishing, thank God . . . and those who are still skeptical are those who have had no exposure. I find that even the most traditional-minded artists can find something, will respond to something. That's a fun dilemma — it's almost like picking the right gift for somebody, picking the comic that will turn them around.

PAT: *You have now handled one of the great archetypes of comics — you got to write and draw Batman. Given the range of material around today, is there anything you want to get your hands on — something of which you say, "I could do something with that"?*

MATT: Not much. Having done Batman, I now have an inclination in my mind to do Superman. That's only natural — you draw the god of darkness, you want to draw the god of light.

I've realized that my own two creations are just that: Grendel is my Batman, and Kevin Matchstick is my Superman.

I don't see much use in revamping things, except for a certain sense of nostalgia and financial considerations — you make a lot of money. But it's like the question, "Why did **Roman Polanski** do MACBETH?" Every artist is aware that he did not come to his artistic ideals in a vacuum, you were influenced. There's always something classic that will stick in your mind, that you'll want to try your hand at sooner or later.

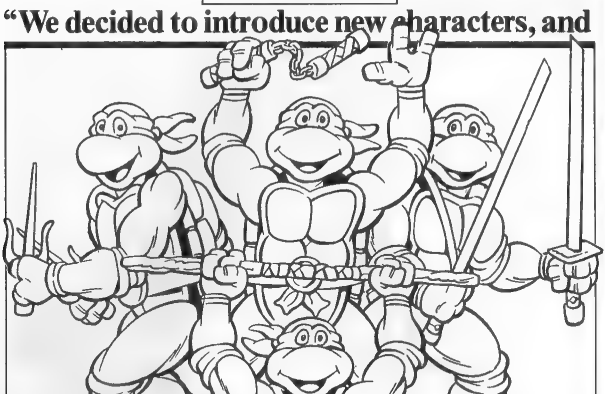
Neal Gaiman and I are kicking around some ideas for a Superman mini-series; I don't know if that will pan out, but I'd like to try it. I'm slated to do THREE MUSKETEERS for First's CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED line . . . and possibly another one as well, the short stories of **Saki**. THREE MUSKETEERS is really *not* a very good book — but there's, again, a sense of nostalgia and it was the original CLASSICS #1.

When I first signed to do the DEMON mini-series for DC some time ago now, I thought, "Wow! Mecca! I'm working for DC, the big guys." Since then, I've realized my real mecca was MAGE that was where the freedom was, where the real expression was coming from.

I'm working on an erotic graphic novel now. I want it to be intelligent, not just gratuitous titillation.

Beyond that, I'm in a unique position here that I have two characters that are both commercially viable and that I own completely. They're entirely open to me to do whatever I want.

"We decided to introduce new characters, and



Amid all the hoopla surrounding Eastman and Laird's creations of late – a true phenomenon, those Turtles – one aspect of the whole scene has gone largely ignored. Except as the butt of some jokes (I'll even cop to having made a few myself), most people have never heard of the Archie Comics TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES ADVENTURES series. But there are two salient facts which are never mentioned, which the detractors of the series are wont to ignore. First, the series is very popular among the younger set, who do not make jokes about it; a very strong entry into that market. Second, the series is directed towards that younger set anyway, and a great deal of care goes into making it not only entertaining for them, but also educational and uplifting; by any other name, good and wholesome stuff. So it was my pleasure to accept this assignment, to interview three of the people involved with TMNTA. And now, if you please, open your mind, shed your preconceptions, and find out for yourself . . .

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get the Turtles out of New York for awhile."

Dean Clarrain, Dan Berger and Ryan Brown

DARREL L. BOATZ: *How did you first come to TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES?*

DEAN CLARRAIN: Gee, I guess through doing proofreading and copy editing of Mirage correspondence

DARREL: *You were working for Eastman and Laird?*

DEAN: Yeah, at Mirage Studios. And then the opening came up for the book, to do an issue, because the book was real late. **Ryan Brown** actually asked me to write it, if I could write an issue, and I did and that was issue #5. And I liked it. And the book was in real trouble at that point, so Archie Comics decided that they needed somebody to be like a production manager at *this* end, to facilitate things. So Ryan and I started doing that together, and because of that we wound up taking over the writing and the direction of the book.

DARREL: *Archie had it originally?*

DEAN: Archie still does publish it, but there was no one really at the helm, so to speak.

DARREL: *They put together —*

DEAN: Four issues.

DARREL: *Who was working on it before you guys?*

DEAN: It was a mix of people, and the book simply got real late. And at that point all the issues were adaptations of the cartoon show, adaptations of the cartoon scripts. It was people's feelings at Mirage that they didn't like the adaptations, they would prefer to go to all-new material.

DARREL: *Was it the stories themselves appearing in a comic book, or just something wrong with the way those stories were coming out?*

DEAN: The act of adapting was fine, the feeling was simply that it was just a little bit too redundant. If we're going to have this color book reaching this many more people than the black-and-white book, we ought to be giving them new material.

DARREL: *That makes sense. It's kind of an unusual situation having a comic-book version of a cartoon of a comic book.*

DEAN: True. Of a cereal. *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *And a video game.*

DEAN: Yep.

DARREL: *What do you think of all this*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Dean Clarrain
Born: 16 December 1959 · New Haven, CT
Occupation: Writer, Editor
Education: Bachelor's in Communication Studies, University of Massachusetts
Credits: TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES ADVENTURES #5 up
Favorite Turtle: Raphael

"The Turtles deal with the various threats facing

Turtles stuff that's going on now, this massive explosion of Turtles on the scene?

DEAN: It's amazing. It's sometimes hard for me to grasp, it's kind of like being in the eye of a storm. You're not quite aware of what's happening around you and then occasionally you get whipped up into the storm and you see what's going on. I get pretty blown away by it; it's so much larger than I realize most of the time

DARREL: *Well, the movie recently . . . I was hoping it would be a good movie, but I'm still stunned that it's done as well as it has.*

DEAN: Based on what, your view of the quality of it?

DARREL: *No, no, just the incredible amount of business and popularity it has.*

DEAN: Oh, I agree.

DARREL: *So, when you came to the Archie book, took that over, what was the first thing you looked at that you wanted to fix?*

DEAN: Well, to try to really play up the fact that it was called *ADVENTURES*, the adventure aspect of it. That was my first feeling, that the cartoon was very limited. It's a half-hour format and they're very repetitive in terms of villains, who are generally the Shredder and Krang. We decided to build upon that universe, to go from there and introduce new characters, and get the Turtles out of New York for awhile, see where their adventures take them.

DARREL: *Kind of free it from its TV format.*

DEAN: Yeah, basically. I also wanted to give it more vim, in addition to the adventure thing — put a bit of an environmental message in some of the stories, use the stories as entertainment but perhaps also get a message across.

DARREL: *Could you give a few examples of the things that you're doing?*

DEAN: Sure. Well, we introduced a character called Man Ray, a marine biologist who gets mutated into kind of a manta-man. So that issue had to do a bit about coastal pollution. We're dealing with a couple of characters who come from species who face *extinction.*

DARREL: *That sounds like it would be a great concept for a cartoon.*

DEAN: Yeah. Unfortunately, the people doing the cartoon don't really look at the comics, I don't think, to get their ideas. Currently we're working on a storyline where the Turtles find themselves in Brazil, and for a few issues they're dealing with the various threats facing the Amazon, the deforestation and pollution of that area. Then from there they have to find their way back to New York; they do so by going across the ocean, so you learn a little bit about marine life and the threats facing marine life. All within an *adventure* format — we introduce characters who almost become symbols for these problems.

DARREL: *That's getting to be topical now, the environment —*

DEAN: Yeah, *finally.* It's something *I've* cared about for years. From college days on I've been involved in environmental groups and whatnot. TMNTA is a wonderful opportunity to reach the kids, because the kids are the ones who can change things. It's *their* world.

DARREL: *Right. Let's see . . . who are all the people working on the book now?*

DEAN: **Ryan Brown** and I plot the issues, and I write them. **Ken Mitchroney** is the regular penciller on the book, although we've had two fill-in artists come in for penciling, **Jim Lawson** and **Don Simpson.** The regular inker on the book is **Dan Berger,** and we had a fill-in inker at one point, **Gary Fields** — who happens to be the book's letterer. The colorist on the book is **Barry Grossman,** and the editor is **Scott Fulop.** Barry and Scott are Archie employees, Ken is out at Warner Brothers in Hollywood (he does this on his weekends) and the rest of us are here at Mirage.

DARREL: *Kind of got you spread a little thin there.*

DEAN: Yeah, we're spread out. *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *Don Simpson, this would be the same guy who does MEGATON MAN?*

DEAN: Yeah, exactly. I've always *loved* his work, and back when we had some real difficulty getting the book going, like issues #5 and #6 — trying to get back on schedule — I met up with Don in San Diego. At that point we were looking for fill-in people, so I approached Don and he was into it. It took about a year before a slot opened for him to come in, but he

the Amazon, the deforestation and pollution."

These pages: art by Simpson and Berger, from TURTLES ADVENTURES #14.

did issue #14, a *tremendous* looking issue.

DARREL: *Now, I noticed in the AMAZING HEROES PREVIEW, not the last one but the one before, the write-up there talks about issues #5 through 16 have a subplot that's going to end up in a two-part story.*

DEAN: It actually ended up being wrapped up with issue #13; #12 and #13 being the two-parter.

DARREL: *What was the idea there?*

DEAN: We introduced some characters in issues #5 through 8, basically; and we wanted there to be an extraterrestrial threat that was facing the Earth, wanted to get the Turtles involved in that. We wanted to get these characters together and we needed a setting. Since the cartoon introduced this other dimension, Dimension X, we thought that was a wide-open concept for ideas that we could play with. So, we just brought this big battle together which will decide the fates of some of these characters, and that will give us a departure point to also get rid of some characters such as Krang and Shredder, who are the primary villains of the TV show. We wanted to put them aside for awhile and now we're developing some new villains.

DARREL: *I was a little surprised when I read that because I'm not used to Archie books having continued stories.*

DEAN: True. We actually got a lot of mail from kids *asking* us to think about that. One letter that comes to mind is from a kid who wanted to *use his imagination more* from issue to issue while he waited. And since we like that serial format to a storyline, we went right for it. And the response has been real positive. It's selling pretty well from what I hear from Archie.

DARREL: *That's great. I like that idea of using your imagination between issues.*

DEAN: Yeah, I do too.

DARREL: *That's a good way of putting it. I tend to get a little frustrated sometimes with continued stories, I'll get to the end of an issue and want the next one now.*

DEAN: Yeah, I kind of feel the same way. That's why we thought we'd put a cap on it and wrap it up by issue #13 and then start something new. And actually the subplot which starts in issue #14 goes up through issue #18, at which point we have a mini-series coming out *featuring* some of these secondary characters

DARREL: *A separate series?*

DEAN: Yes. It will be called MIGHTY MUTANIMALS, a three-issue mini-series. The Turtles will guest-star in the first issue, and it will wrap up that plotline begun in TURTLES ADVENTURES #14.

DARREL: *What's the plotline?*

DEAN: This race of . . . kind of insect-like aliens, who play a minor role in the events of issues #12 and 13, take a main role here. They are a race that comes to a planet that's suffering environmental collapse or weakness and take advantage of the situation, they kind of *quicken* the process. They have a queen mother whose name is *Maligna*, and they receive help from this guy here in Earth called *Null*. That becomes a threat that the Turtles wind up not fully facing, that falls

PAUL S. POWER'S
EAST meets WEST
INNOVATION
EAST meets WEST
2
Don't Miss The Excitement!
INNOVATION

"Archie's after us to get a second title going."

in the laps of these secondary characters called *Mutanimals* who have all been introduced in TMNTA.

DARREL: *Trying to get your series going here, huh?*

DEAN: No! *(Laughter.)* Archie's been after us to get a second title going, so we thought of a way of doing it without making it just another Turtles title.

DARREL: *I want to go back a little bit, how did you first get together with Eastman and Laird?*

DEAN: I ran into them at a couple of shows. At the time I was living in New Haven and they were living here in Northampton, and life wound up taking me to Northampton for a job, and I ran into them again. At that point things at Mirage were sort of expanding.

DARREL: *Were you familiar with TMNT before that?*

DEAN: Peripherally. I had read some of the black-and-white books, and I was kind of aware of the success as it was spreading out, I knew about the TV cartoons. I was totally unaware of most of the merchandising, I was totally unaware of the toys.

DARREL: *I've heard some mention about a TURTLES comic strip in the works.*

DEAN: True. We've been approached to do a syndicated strip, a daily as well as a Sunday. If you want to get in touch with me again in a few weeks I can really talk about it then, but right now the contract's still going back and forth.

DARREL: *It's too early to talk about.*

DEAN: Yeah. But I really think that the contract is proceeding okay, so in a couple of weeks I think I can tell you more. I can say that we're aiming for a September release on it.

DARREL L. BOATZ: *How did you first get started working on TMNT stuff?*

RYAN BROWN: Back in 1985 — I was working in Cleveland, and I decided to blow off a weekend with my friend **Dan Berger,** who is now inking the book. We decided to go to Detroit, there was a comics convention there. I heard that Pete and Kevin were going to do a signing there, so we decided it would be neat to see them. I had seen the first issue, had read it and enjoyed it, so I figured it would be a *kick* to meet them.

DARREL: *You started picking up TMNT from the very first?*

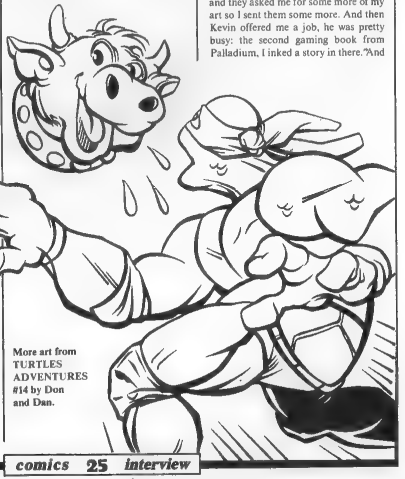
RYAN: A friend had given me the first issue to read. I really liked it; it was pretty goonie. I'll have to say, the *reason* I liked it was here were two guys just going against the norm. I backed them because at the time that was my favorite book, and I didn't buy any Marvels or anything like that. Because of CEREBUS I decided to look at other titles that were put out by people that were trying to break out of the mainstream.

DARREL: *Had you been thinking towards getting into comics before then?*

RYAN: Kind of. I was working at a greasy, grimy T-shirt place in downtown Cleveland. We were in the basement of this old factory building that was run-down and had cockroaches the size of your foot, it was pretty freaky. But I was doing T-shirt designs, for, like, the Cleveland Grand Prix and the air shows and the radio station there, WGCL.

DARREL: *Could you describe your first meeting with Eastman and Laird?*

RYAN: Well, you couldn't get near the table because there was a *ton* of people around it. I finally waited in line, got up to them, and they were real, real friendly. That was really freaky, that they were really nice guys. They took time with everyone, that's why there was such a line. They would sit there and talk to you. I bought a copy of issue #3 from them, and they autographed it. And Dan and I had sketched up a drawing while we were there, gave it to them, and they seemed to be impressed with it, and *kept* it. Then we left the show, and in the third reprint of #1 they put a little notice in there saying how they'd like to see more of my stuff. It really freaked me out! *(Laughter.)* So I wrote Kevin, kept in contact with him, and they asked me for some more of my art so I sent them some more. And then Kevin offered me a job, he was pretty busy: the second gaming book from Palladium, I inked a story in there. And



More art from TURTLES ADVENTURES #14 by Don and Dan.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Ryan Brown
Born: 2 May 1962 — Lodi, OH
Occupation: Cartoonist, editor, whatever
Education: Just high school
Credits: I worked on TALES OF THE TURTLES with Kevin and Pete, that's how I started; TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES ADVENTURES #5 and beyond
Favorite Turtle: Donatello

"I find the marketing end of it fascinating."

WINGNUT

he said if it worked out they'd send me some more work, and it passed the grade — *barely!* He seemed to like it, I don't know why. *(Laughter.)* I never expected to get into comics, I'm just really, really lucky. And then it just went on from there. I did a couple of other projects with them, and then they asked me to move up about a year later.

DARREL: *The little shoestring operation turned into a company and they started needing some company men.*

RYAN: Yeah — actually, before that even. They had not met **Mark Freedman,** the toys and none of that was even happening, but they had a lot of little projects going. So I moved up from Ohio; I always wanted to live in New England, so I took the chance. And it ended up working out, the work increased and increased and increased. And now it's ended up at the Archie book. No one wanted to handle it, that's when I got the idea to ask my then-roommate, **Dean Clarrain,** if he'd want to work on it with me.

DARREL: *You mentioned Mark Freedman there, what do you think of all this Turtles phenomenon that's going on?*

RYAN: Well, I come at it — like, I collect old toys, have always been into that — so I find the marketing end of it fascinating. A lot of people think it's unartistic or terrible or this or that, but I think the Turtles have remained what Pete and Kevin have wanted. And I kind of enjoy all the hoopla. It's kind of a *bit* much now because of the movie. But I thought it was *neat* to try to make a toy line out of it, and to try to adapt it to the mainstream — I see a challenge there. **Mark Freedman** is amazing. He has a sharp eye for what sells, and he spotted the Turtles, and without him it probably would never have been this big. It really turned into a monster, and he negotiated and pushed it through.

DARREL: *And it's fun to watch, you know.*

RYAN: Yeah, it's fun to watch, and it's fun to be here in Turtle Central and sit back and watch everything.

Mondogecko, designed by Ryan Brown

DARREL: *And when you see them put the toys up in the stores, you better grab one of them because if you wait and go back an hour later it's not going to be there; it's really incredible.*

RYAN: And I'm into that end, I like to design the toys. I've designed a few —

DARREL: *Yeah, which ones?*

RYAN: Wingnut, Leatherhead, Scumbug, Man Ray, and Mondo Gecko; and there's a couple more that will be coming out that I did.

DARREL: *Now, you said no one wanted to work on the Archie book, what was the problem there?*

RYAN: It had gotten to the point where I don't think it really had a leader. Well, no . . . everything was happening so fast, all the licenses were coming in with the toy line and everything, and the Archie book was kind of afloat. Peter and Kevin and

LEATHERHEAD

everybody had gotten too busy and it got out of everyone's hands. And I saw the opportunity to move in and kind of take it over. I like the merchandising end of the Turtles, so it was kind of cool to move in that direction. When Dean and I went in and asked them if we could handle it they said that they would be fine, that would be great. It was — how would you say — we're the only ones that asked. *(Laughter.)* Or maybe it was just the first one to speak up got it, because it was in turmoil. Maybe not turmoil, but things weren't getting done and no one had the time to get them done.

DARREL: *They needed someone to take charge of it.*

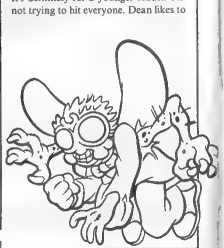
RYAN: Yeah. They needed someone here at Mirage to give it a direction.

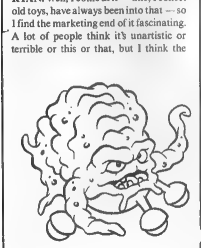
DARREL: *Okay. Each of the Turtles thing, the black-and-white book and the animated series and now the movie, seem to target slightly different audiences.*

RYAN: Yeah.

DARREL: *What is the audience that's being targeted with this book?*

RYAN: The way I like to think of it is when I was younger, five to ten, something like that, the comic books I picked up then were real cool for a definite kid audience. It's when comic books are kind of magical, you pick it up and you love it. It's definitely for a younger reader. I'm not trying to hit everyone. Dean likes to





"I'm into that end, I like to design the toys."

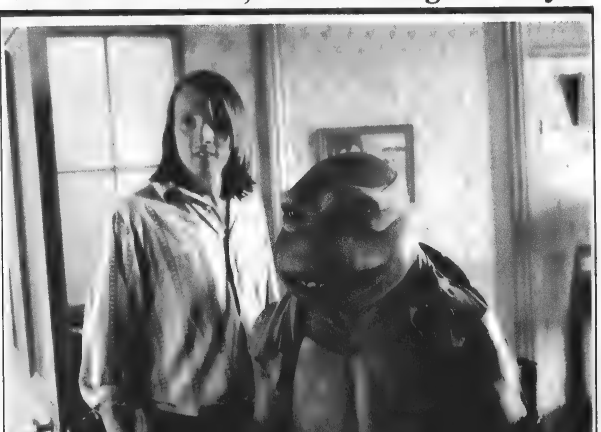


Photo: Alan Mansfield / ©1990 Northshore Investments, Ltd.

do that, and I think you *can* hit everyone with things like the environmental messages that are stuck in there — but primarily it's aimed at a younger audience.

DARREL: *When we spoke with the movie people they said they were trying to get the best of both worlds, put enough in there for the older audience but also try to retain what the cartoon had.*

RYAN: Right, yeah. **Steve Barron,** the director, was really into it. He had read the books and he stayed faithful to them, he even went to far as to use some of the sequences from the comics as his storyboards.

DARREL: *Wow.*

RYAN: And we went down on the movie set in North Carolina, and he took the pains to talk to Pete and Kevin, find out what they thought of things. Everyone on the film was really into making it the quintessential Turtles, I guess — what Kevin and Pete see. Everyone else in the world sees them as different colored headbands eating pizza. I don't really prefer the pizza end, I could do without all *that* stuff — but they kind of took the Turtles from the black-and-white book, put colored bandanas on them, made them joke around a little bit more, and gave them pizza. And that was about it. The action and the violence and the stuff like that was out of the regular books.

DARREL: *Did you get a chance to see the Turtles live?*

RYAN: What do you mean?

DARREL: *Down on the set.*

RYAN: Oh, yeah, I did! That was *incredible!* I've always been a big admirer of **Jim Henson,** when I was younger I wanted to be a puppeteer, kind of had a dream to work with **Jim Henson** on SESAME STREET or something. When I heard he was going to do the Turtles, I, along with everyone here, was really *excited.* And I just missed meeting him. We were there for three or four days, and they shot all night so we had to sleep all day — breakfast was at 10:00 at night. **Jim Henson** showed up the last day when we were about ready to leave, and Kevin got to meet him. I would have liked to but didn't get the chance. I saw his son, **Brian Henson.** He was handling a lot of the second unit directing and stuff. And the Turtle suits were *amazing.* I don't know exactly how heavy they were, but in their shells they had all the motors that ran their heads and their faces. And they had all this mechanical gadgetry attached to them with cables. And the heads, the way they sculpted them, I think they got a lot of the expressions right out of the comic books. You can go back to the black-and-whites and see where they modeled the heads right off of the drawings.

DARREL: *The facial movements are really incredible.*

RYAN: Yeah, they almost seem like they're alive.

DARREL: *Almost?* (Laughter.)

RYAN: They do. When I was watching the movie at the premiere — we saw it around a month before it was out — after awhile I forgot that they were fake. They really seem alive.

"I *want* Miller and Moore stuff, but I would be

Photo: Alan Markfield / ©1990 Northshore Investments, Ltd

DARREL: *I understand there might be a live show, a stage production of some kind, in the works.*

RYAN: I've heard there's supposed to be a skate show, but I haven't heard anything definite, just a rumor that they were working on it. But I don't know. Any more I try to keep focussed mainly on the Archie book, I don't even watch the TV show. We try to keep our own vision with the Archie book, build our own story. The other stuff can really bleed over into you and you can get caught up in it, so I try to stay away from the hype.

DARREL: *What would you say was the vision of the Archie book? What's the purpose, the aim, whatever?*

RYAN: Well, from when we took over I'd say it's kind of to educate kids along with entertaining them. I think when you have the Turtles, that are such icons of a generation — I mean about every kid *loves* them — whatever the Turtles say is very important, the kids will listen to them. So what we try to work in — especially Dean — are environmental messages, a respect for the elderly, respect for parents. We try to work in basic things to just teach kids good, wholesome values. **Ken Mitchroney's** art is real cartooney, which is awesome, and Dean's writing is heavy at times, has a bigger message to it, and they blend together so that the kids can look at it and enjoy it, and adults can look at it and see the message in it. At least that's what we're *trying* to do. I think it can be something other than just a dumb thing. A lot of people don't like kids' comic books, but they forget how important they can be. Now, I love where comics are going and I'm excited they're going that way, but I don't want to forget that when you're a little kid and you go to the five and dime and pick up your comic, there's a *magic* there. There should still be comics for kids.

DARREL: *I think you're right.*

RYAN: People seem to be down on the Archie book, other Turtle fans. They've got to remember that you *do* grow up and that's *fine*, but you can't forget about where you come from. I'm glad, I *want* **Frank Miller** and **Alan Moore** stuff, all that stuff to be out there, but I would be happy to work on TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES ADVENTURES the rest of my life. This is the direction I want to go. And I love working with Dean, it's a really really good, positive relationship. I'm really happy and I hope that we can do this for a real long time.

happy to work on TURTLES the rest of my life."

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Dan Berger
Born: 2 March 1965 — Amherst, OH
Occupation: Right now basically I'm just inking TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES ADVENTURES, so I guess I'm an inker.
Education: I have a BFA in illustration from the Cleveland Institute of Art.
Credits: Other than TMNTA #8, 10, 12, I don't have any I really want to mention. I did THE BOOGIEMAN #1 from Nuclear Age Comics and no one's ever seen it, much to my happiness. *(Laughter.)* Then I finished college and right out of school Ryan got me this job.
Favorite Turtle: Raphael

DARREL L. BOATZ: *How did you come to work on TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES ADVENTURES?*

DAN BERGER: Well, I'll keep it shorter than Ryan's story, but basically I went to the same show that Ryan went to, met Kevin and Pete. And then Ryan struck up this friendship with Kevin, moved up here, and I stayed in touch with Ryan. And as soon as I graduated college it turned out that they pretty much needed someone that would make a full-time commitment to inking the Archie book, and I needed a job, so Ryan gave me the try-out and everything worked out.

DARREL: *Had you been thinking of going into comics before then?*

DAN: Well, kind of. When I first got into art school that's what I wanted to do, but throughout art school they try to train you that everything is evil. *(Laughter.)* So I decided that I might try to stick with straight-up book illustration, but comics were always in the background. And then I got up here and started working on the Archie book, and it seems like more fun than I could have working on anything else. Comics have always been an interest, it's just that it started to fade away, but now the fire is rekindled.

DARREL: *Working on the art in the book — obviously somebody else does the pencils if you're just doing the inking —*

DAN: Right.

DARREL: *But how much attention do you pay to the fact that you're aiming for a juvenile audience while you're inking the book?*

DAN: Well, my opinion is that children are more observant and care a lot more about things than people give them credit for, so basically I'm doing the absolute best that I can do. I've only been a comics inker for eight months so I'm not very good at it yet, but I put six to eight hours in a page to try to do the best job. I really think, even though it's aimed at a younger audience, they *care* about what they get, they want something that looks good. And we've gotten some letters that say they've liked what **Mitchroney** and I have done, as opposed to some previous issues, so that shows that kids care.

DARREL: *How familiar were you with the Turtles? Were you aware of TMNT from the very start?*

DAN: I heard about it through **CBG, Don Thompson** gave them a good review when it first showed up, so I was looking for it but I couldn't find an issue until #3. And I loved it. We're always sitting around up here trying to figure out why the Turtles are so popular, and I went to this art school where they tried to train me to *hate* comics, and since #3 I've loved the Turtles and don't know why. It seems like that's a lot of the sentiment throughout the country. People love

From TURTLES ADVENTURES #14

"Fine art is fine for a portion of the population, but

them. You don't know *why* you love them, they've just got that element. I can't really explain it, but ever since I saw #3 it's like, "Wow, these are great! Can't get enough of these guys!" It's kind of weird.

DARREL: *My own theory is that cartooning tends to tap into the emotional fun-loving part of a person.*

DAN: Right.

DARREL: *The fine art is supposed to be really sophisticated and stuff, and these art school type people can't really understand cartooning because of that.*

DAN: They don't even try. Actually, me and Ryan talk about that a lot. Fine art is fine for a real segregated portion of the population, but there's nothing that's more universal than cartooning. A good cartoon can be appreciated by anyone. Maybe *that's* what it is! *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *Have you been following the whole phenomenon with the movie and the cartoons and the toys and everything?*

DAN: Maybe we're a little more protected here from a lot of the hype because we're in a smaller area, we don't get the big influx of stuff. When I come to the office is when I really see how big it is, because they send all the clips from all around the country; that's when you go, "Wow, this is just totally unbelievable!" But I try to stay away from it as much as possible. It's not like I had anything to do with it, it doesn't affect me other than it's really great for Kevin and Pete. It makes me happy to see that it's really popular, hopefully that will carry over to the Archie book.

DARREL: *What did you think of the movie?*

DAN: I really liked the movie. I know it's caught a lot of flak for being violent, but on Saturday afternoons you can find just as much violence on TV. **Commander** USA on the USA Network used to show the kung-fu movies, I think those had as much violence as the TURTLES movie. But TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES,has got a really strong sense of *family* about it, they're brothers and Splinter's a father image. It's got some nice things in it for the kids to enjoy. Maybe it does promote violence, but I think it's the typical kung-fu violence where they don't do anything until they're threatened.

DARREL: *Right.*

DAN: I think in today's society if you think you can get threatened and not have to strike back, you're kidding yourself.

DARREL: *Well, yeah. I usually view things like that where the violence is really a metaphor.*

DAN: Right.

DARREL: *This is just one way of pointing out how you live your life. Hopefully you're not going to run into a lot of real violence in your life, but you are going to run into confrontation and have to deal with problems and things.*

DAN: Right. And usually if it's of a violent nature you can't stop it. If some guy's going to hit you with a club, he's going to hit you with a club. There's no example in the movie where the Turtles settle things verbally . . . it's really hard to call. I thought the movie was good, though. *(Laughter.)* Violence is a difficult issue and you're not going to sway the people who thought the movie was too violent.

DARREL: *Well, they're entitled to their opinions, of course.*

DAN: Right.

DARREL: *But I think it gets overblown a lot.*

DAN: Well, yeah. TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES was just the next thing to come along, like BATMAN was when it came out. As soon as you get that much of the public eye there's people that are going to attack it.

DARREL: *Yeah. You get big, you're a target.*

DAN: Right

DARREL: *Well, since you've gotten a steady assignment here, have you taken*

there's nothing that's more universal than cartooning."

to studying other inkers, what they do?

DAN: Yeah, I've been trying. Ryan helps me a lot because he's a really good inker. I'm inking a **Donald Simpson** thing now and I've been looking at THE ETERNALS by **Kirby** because Don had talked to Kevin about trying to get a **Jack Kirby** feel for this issue, #14, of the Archie book. Basically, I'm just trying to get the look that the penciller is looking for. Mitch has been pretty happy with what I've been doing, so I'm concentrating on getting it to look cleaner, to look better. This is the first time I've really sat down with references to try to match. I'm sure I'm not going to ink it as well as Don could do himself, but I'll give it a shot. This is a Jagwar story, a new character that **Dean Clarrain** made up. It's an issue about the rain forest, I believe. I don't read them until I get them finished.

Two faces of Jagwar: Cover by Mitchroney, Brown & Berger. Opposite page, Simpson & Berger. Both from #14.

(Laughter.) I kind of skip around to different pages and then read them after it's all done.

DARREL: *Other artists do that same thing, like if they're really pressed for time they'll go to an easy page.*

DAN: Yeah. If I feel like working I'll grab a hard page, and if I'm not having a good day if I'm pretty tired then I'll grab the easier pages. It just depends on the mood you're in, I guess.

DARREL: *Well, is there anything else you'd like to talk about?*

DAN: I'd like to mention **Ken Mitchroney.** I'm just overjoyed to work with Ken because he's just *really* great. He's pretty much the heart and soul of the Archie book right now. Ryan and Dean are plotting stories that I think are really great, but Ken's got that *look* that the kids just love. It's a great joy for me to work with him.

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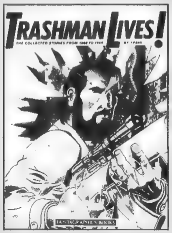

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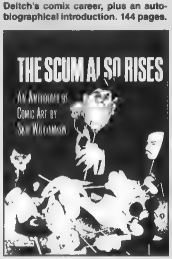

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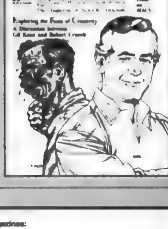

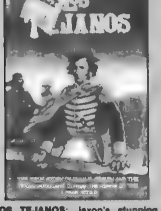

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"I'll never forget Harvey saying, 'FLASH

DAN BARRY

Dan Barry, under his grapevines on Capri.

While Dan is famous in the comics field for his work on *FLASH GORDON*, Barry's recognition as a serious artist has been great both here and overseas. When art supply manufacturer Grumbacher chose 21 prominent American artists for an exhibit of works to tour the U.S. Dan Barry was among them. His work is on permanent exhibition in U.S. embassies in Europe.

Daniel Barry was born in New Jersey in 1923, grew up in New York City, where at 12 he won his first art scholarship, and had turned professional by the age of 18. Having served as a war artist in the Second World War, Dan returned to set up his own advertising art studio, while maintaining his fine art studies at the Art Students League and the New School.

The use of illustration as an educational medium won Dan awards from the Freedom Foundation and a grant from the Fund for the Republic. As a teacher/lecturer at the School of Visual Arts, in 1956 he was invited to tour U.S. bases in Europe for the USO.

Dan remained overseas for seven years, working in the South of France, Florence and Salzburg. He studied at the Kokoschka Workshop in Austria, and later founded an art colony in Tyrol, where he conducted his own classes

Barry has had eight one-man shows, at home and abroad, exhibited in six major group shows, 16 invitational exhibitions and four national exhibitions have also featured his work, as well as seven national TV programs and many radio appearances.

When DAK took over publishing *COMICS REVUE*, editor and longtime comics connoisseur Rick Norwood's first request was to sit in on an interview with the legendary Dan Barry. So on Rick's visit to work out the *COMICS REVUE* details with DAK, off all went to Dan's for a long evening with marketing manager Julia Mather and *FLASH GORDON* letterer and colorist Gail Beckett, an evening of Dan's rousing tales. And what better way to celebrate this new addition to the Comics Interview Group of publications, since

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GORDON? Does anybody read it?'"

Mornings on the balcony of his Tyrol chalet, 1960s. Doing some chess analysis was a way to wake the mind for a day's work at the drawing board.

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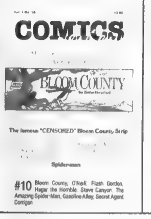

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"I got Frazetta his first job when he was 16."

COMICS REVUE features the complete current run of FLASH GORDON, alongside THE PHANTOM, MODESTY BLAISE, BLOOM COUNTY, and many another!

In this third part of the Barry interview Dan speaks of Frank Frazetta, who worked as his assistant, of science fiction writer Harry Harrison, who once wrote FLASH GORDON with Dan and has a recent cameo appearance in the strip, and of Dan's views on FLASH GORDON creator and acclaimed artist, Alex Raymond. Plus: FLASH GORDON: THE MOVIE and the dastardly Dino DeLaurentis story . . .

Johnny Giunta

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT: *How did you get to meet him, and how did he get to be your assistant?*

DAN BARRY: Frazetta? I got Frank his first job when he was sixteen years old. **Johnny Giunta** lived in an Italian neighborhood that was the equivalent of my poor neighborhood — you'll find in big cities that Jewish and Italian neighborhoods always abut each other; they're so much alike, and yet they're apart. I told you about my first job with Funnies, Inc., after I left **Alan Mandel.** Johnny inked it. I came in and I was used to Alan's inking, and I was aware of my limitations. Johnny put blacks in — he *understood* lighting, he was an illustrator. When I saw the job, I raved, "This guy's terrific! This is beautiful! I can't believe that I did this stuff!" And **FitzSimmons** says, "Are you feeling all right? I never heard a penciller yet say *anything* good about an inker!" *(Laughter.)*

I walked back into their art room and there was this skinny balding guy — *thin,* skeletal — and I looked over his shoulder and he was inking my stuff, and I realized it was John. I said something like, "Pretty good pencils, huh." He said, "Yeah." We were friends forever. *(Laughter.)* I told him who I was, and almost in tears he said, "Oh, boy, you don't know what you did for me. I was at a point where I couldn't get a job anymore, artists complained about what I did, that I'd changed their work." You know, they'd give him some lousy pencils and he'd try to correct them — they wouldn't give him pencilling for some reason. I have this feeling about . . . I won't say editors, but life in general — when you see someone that has personality problems and insecurity, if *you've* got problems, like the publisher's on your back, you're then like Mr. Timid who comes home and is a tyrant to his wife. These artists just get terrorized and victimized by editors who sense their weakness and are weak themselves. Johnny was one of those gentle people often victimized. In any case, this turned out to be Johnny's blessing, and he had a steady job with Funnies, Inc.

RICK NORWOOD: *What book was that?*

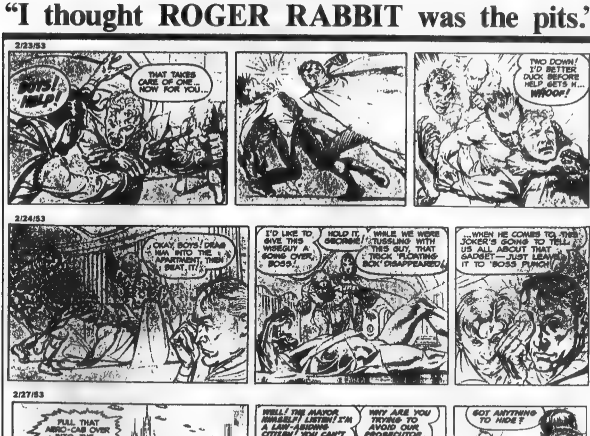
DAN: That was BLUE BOLT. We were doing a thing called YOUNG ROBIN HOOD, do you remember that? The kid dressed like Robin Hood, you know. Why would a kid fight gangsters with bows and arrows? It just made good pictures. *(Laughter.)* We were doing something else that **Spillane** was writing, another costumed character . . . not the Green Hornet, there was another . . . was there a Green Lantern?

RICK: *That was DC, did Spillane ever write for DC?*

DAN: I can't remember. BLUE BOLT was a big seller at the time. Anyway, Johnny introduced this neighborhood kid to me whom he thought had some talent, right after the War. **Frank Frazetta** was sixteen at the time, a cheerful kind of kid. *(Laughter.)* He opened this portfolio of animal stuff, it was **Disney** like **Disney** wished he could do it. It was un-be-liev-able! Watercolors, halftones — *incredible!* So I took him up. **Bernard Baily** had just started a studio publishing house at the time, and I had just come back, was just mustered out of the Army. '46 I guess. So, the first day I went out, picked up about five scripts, came home and started working — and somehow ran into Bernard, whom I had worked with. **Bernard Baily** was a *rather* good artist. I always liked that thing he did, THE SPECTRE. Very nice stylized stuff! But he was a sleazy guy. He was a typical back office garment industry guy — he looked it, he was fat, walrus moustache, and his eyes never met yours. I don't know how he got the backing for it, but he had a little publishing company.

He had **Charlie Voigt** working there. Charlie was like almost a contemporary of **N.C. Wyeth,** somebody I had grown up in *awe* of, the books of his illustrations and stuff. He had done several comic strips that never really took off, but he had done a couple of advertising series that were classics. There were these cupcakes that were called Two For O'Nickel, they were two for a nickel, and he had done a comic strip called TOOFER O'NICKEL — it was a classic. So, there were guys of that stature there, and Charlie was sort of at the end of his

"I thought ROGER RABBIT was the pits."


2/23/53
BOYS! HELP!
THAT TAKES CARE OF ONE... NOW FOR YOU...
TWO DOWN! I'D BETTER DUCK BEFORE HELEN GETS H... WHOOP!
2/24/53
OKAY, BOYS! DRAG HIM INTO THE APARTMENT, THEN BEAT IT!
I'D LIKE TO GIVE THIS WISEGUY A GOOD OVER, BOSS!
HOLD IT, GEORGE!
WHILE WE WERE TUSSLING WITH THIS GUY, THAT TRICK FLOATING BOW DISAPPEARED!
WHEN HE COMES TO, TELL JOKER'S GOONS TO TELL US ALL ABOUT THAT GADGET — JUST LEAVE IT TO "BOSS PUNCH"!
2/27/53
FULL THAT ABRO-CAB OVER INTO THE ISLING ZONE!
POLICE
WELL! THE MAYOR INVISIBLE! LISTEN! I'M A LAW-ABIDING CITIZEN! YOU CAN'T SNOOP AROUND!
WHY ARE YOU TRYING TO AVOID OUR PROSECUTOR, PUNCH?
GOT ANYTHING TO HIDE?
2/28/53
PUNCH! WE KNOW YOU'RE RUNNING THE RACKETS AT THE CARGO-LOADING SPACE PLATFORMS OFF SHORE! WE HAVEN'T PROVED IT YET! BUT WE'RE GOING TO, TRY!
AND WE'RE STARTING WITH THIS!
...A SUMMONS TO APPEAR BEFORE A PLANETARY INVESTIGATING COMMITTEE!
HAH! YOU GUYS ARE JUST ITCHING TO SEND ME UP TO THE MAKE PERCH! BUT YOU CAN'T GET A THING ON ME! I'M CLEAN AS A NEW SNOWFALL!
GRO-OAN!

Before & after: Frank Frazetta's tight pencils against the finished inks of Dan Barry. Frazetta only stayed with the strip for a two-week period beginning Feb. 21, 1953.

career, and he was still terrific — he did some of the best comics I have ever seen — and unfortunately it was only about three months that I knew him, because I learned more watching him work than anywhere else in all of my years. Watching him pencil, seeing how he conceived, seeing how he told a story, it was an education.

Well anyway, I got Frank a job there (at Bailey's). I would do some penciling, Frank would ink it, or I'd be in a deadline pinch and Frank would help me. He didn't need me. I see a great parallel between him and **Walt Kelly,** they're the same types of genius. **Kelly** was an incredible genius. **Kelly** came out of the Disney Studio, and that was back when the Disney stuff was awesome. I'm the only person I know, besides Gail perhaps, who thought ROGER RABBIT

"Lou Fine was as good as Norman Rockwell."

BOYS! HELP!
THAT TAKES CARE OF ONE. NOW FOR YOU
TAG DOWN! I'D BETTER LOOK BEFORE HE GETS UP... WHOOF!
OKAY, BOYS! DRAG HIM INTO THE APARTMENT, THEN BEAT IT!
I'D LIKE TO GIVE THIS WISE GUY A GOING OVER, BOSS
HOLD IT, GEORGIE! WHILE WE WERE TUSSLING WITH THIS GUY, THAT TRICK 'FLOATING BOX' DISAPPEARED!
...WHEN HE COMES TO THIS JOKER'S GOING TO TELL US ALL ABOUT THAT GADGET — JUST LEAVE IT TO 'BOSS PUNCH'!
PULL THAT AERO-CAB OVER INTO THE IDLING ZONE!
112 POLICE
WELL! THE MAYOR HIMSELF! LISTEN! I'M A LAW-ABIDING CITIZEN! YOU CAN'T SHOVE ME AROUND!
WHY ARE YOU TRYING TO AVOID OUR PROSECUTOR, PUNCH?
GOT ANYTHING TO HIDE?
PUNCH! WE KNOW YOU'RE RUNNING THE RACKETS AT THE CARGO-LOADING SPACE PLATFORMS OFFSHORE! WE HAVEN'T PROVED IT YET, BUT WE'RE GOING TO, TRY!
AND WE'RE STARTING WITH THIS!.
A SUMMONS TO APPEAR BEFORE A PLANETARY INVESTIGATING COMMITTEE!
HAH! YOU GUYS ARE JUST ITCHING TO SEND ME UP TO THE MARS PRISON! BUT YOU CAN'T GET A THING ON ME! I'M CLEAN AS A NEW SNOWFALL!
GRO-OAH!

was the pits. I thought the animation was the worst drawing I've seen in years. The only thing I was impressed with was the mix of live and animation, and of course **Bob Hoskins** was the best thing in the movie. I thought the animation was terrible, I really did.

RICK: *It wasn't warm, it was basically unpleasant.*

DAN: Well, I'm beginnng to feel about **Spielberg** the way **Reed Crandall** felt about my comics - just a little too rich! *(Laughter.)* He just crams everything in there and he awes you, overwhelms you, but the substance and the taste is so lacking. I've seen very little of **Spielberg** beyond the first things, that I like.

RICK: *I noticed that you get some very funny moments in ROGER RABBIT, but the Disney stuff doesn't have any of the warmth, it's very cold. I liked ROGER RABBIT basically, but I didn't get any emotional charge out of it.*

JULIA MATHER: *I think it's because it*

COMICS REVUE

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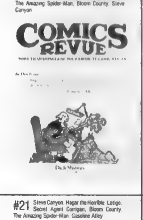

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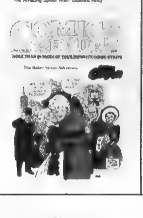

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"Paul Hogan is doing the PHANTOM movie."

was the mix. They took something that's strictly fantasy and put it in a real setting.

DAN: It was a milestone, there's no doubt about that.

JULIA: *But what I'm saying is it lost the warmth by having the real backdrop with the animation.*

DAN: I didn't want to say how disappointed I was. I came out of the movie and gushed at Gail for an hour, and she said, "You know, you just ruined that movie for me." *(Laughter.)*

RICK: *There is nothing worse than somebody telling you why you shouldn't have had a good time.*

DAN: It's hard — doing a comic strip you're involved in almost all of the same creative processes — it's hard when you don't really like something to just let it ride. You've picked up the bad acting here, the bad writing there, and so on, and you can't help analyzing why it doesn't work.

JULIA: *DAK does it every time. Does Dan tell you the end of everything halfway through?*

GAIL BECKETT: I always know the end but I don't tell him.

JULIA: *Dave tells me the complete plotline ten minutes into the movie.*

But it is nice to pretend that you don't know and just enjoy it as a movie — I like to do that.

DAN: I use this to great advantage, because I know what Gail thinks I'm going to do on the strip the next day, and I do something else. *(Laughter.)* That helps.

GAIL: You *flatter* yourself. *(Laughter.)* That's why *I* don't tell *him* what's going to happen.

DAN: I can't win. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Now, you said Bernard Bailey was a good artist and —*

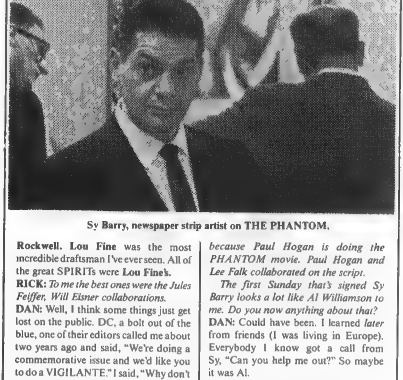
DAN: Did I say **Bailey** was a good artist? I meant he did a nice strip. I liked THE SPECTRE, it had a nice *mood* to it. **Bailey** was *not* an exceptional artist — but THE SPECTRE was a nice feature the way he did it. Now, if you want to talk about *good* artists, **Lou Fine** was as good as **Norman Rockwell.**

RICK: *No, I wouldn't say that.*

DAN: Have you ever seen **Lou Fine's** pencils?

RICK: *Of course I've never seen his pencils, I wasn't there.*

DAN: **Lou Fine** once showed me, and I still to this day don't know why he never broke into it, some of his projected SATURDAY EVENING POST covers. They were as good as **Rockwell,** maybe better. He could paint as well as draw, and he could draw better — and I respect



Sy Barry, newspaper strip artist on THE PHANTOM.

Rockwell. Lou Fine was the most incredible draftsman I've ever seen. All of the great SPIRITs were **Lou Fine's.**

RICK: *To me the best ones were the Jules Feiffer, Will Eisner collaborations.*

DAN: Well, I think some things just get lost on the public. DC, a bolt out of the blue, one of their editors called me about two years ago and said, "We're doing a commemorative issue and we'd like you to do a VIGILANTE." I said, "Why don't you get **Meskin?** He was the guy who created it." And talk about thankless jobs, following **Meskin** was more thankless than following **Alex Raymond.** I *tried* to follow **Meskin** on VIGILANTE. The interesting thing is they never got any fan mail on VIGILANTE, it never sold well, until I started doing it. **Meskin's** stuff was *lost* on the public. He worked in great big compositions and it lacked detail, but the readers see detail, they like that. Anyway, I couldn't do the VIGILANTE again. They sent me some stuff because I didn't even remember what the costume was like, and then it turned out they just wanted *one* page. I said, "There's no way in the world that I can sacrifice my deadlines, by which I'm hanging on a thread, to do a one-shot.

RICK: *Your brother, by the way, every package I get from King Features has a little note saying THE PHANTOM will follow as soon as they can mail it.*

DAN: You're kidding.

RICK: *THE PHANTOM comes in a different package about two days later.*

DAN: I don't know why the hell he's late. He always was slow.

RICK: *It may be Lee Falk who's late.*

DAN: I doubt that. Lee was always *months* ahead.

RICK: *Lee's been going to Australia a lot because Paul Hogan is doing the PHANTOM movie. Paul Hogan and Lee Falk collaborated on the script.*

The first Sunday that's signed Sy Barry looks a lot like Al Williamson to me. Do you now anything about that?

DAN: Could have been. I learned *later* from friends (I was living in Europe). Everybody I know got a call from Sy, "Can you help me out?" So maybe it was Al.

RICK: *Al did some stuff for you on FLASH GORDON, didn't he?*

DAN: Very little. At that point Al was one of the key artists at EC along with Wally, whose work I really preferred. Al had not yet developed the way he was going to. EC had a space book which I thought was tops, a science fiction book. I thought that even with his limitations — his limitations being that he *really* was an animator, a Disney-type artist — I thought **Wally Wood** was by far the best artist they had. Al was a close second.

Speaking of good, of really good, I got a fan letter the other day, along with a strip from an Italian cartoonist, **Claudio Onesti** (professionally called "Clod") — draws for weekly mags PIF (French) and IL GIORNALINO (Italian) — lives in Modena. He's good! When I lived in Europe, the *level* of comics illustration was *terrible.* I've been back since '64, but I haven't lived there and paid attention to it — I turn my back and suddenly people are telling me about the good stuff coming out of Europe. I didn't believe it. I shared a studio with a group of French artists, and back in those days I would lay out the stuff quickly, thumbnail stuff, then write it, and then do it on the page — now I skip that stage. Well, these guys used to fight at the end of the day *over*

"I loved it in the south of France. I moved down

those thumbnail sketches I'd thrown away. I was reminded of the story **Caniff** used to tell, that when **Noel Sickles** would leave at the end of the day at Associated Press everybody dove for the wastebasket to get his discarded sketches. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Why did you leave Europe?*

DAN: Well, it's a long complicated story. **Gary Davis,** do you know who I'm talking about? **Gary Davis** was a pilot in World War II, and his father was **Meyer Davis** — the orchestra leader who was also a businessman. All of the lines, no matter what ship you sailed on, the orchestra was owned by **Meyer Davis.** Gary came out of that kind of very privileged background. He had been on Broadway, he was in the original STALAG 17 cast and like that. And he did this very noble thing. He was an Air Force pilot, he was in on the bombing of Dresden, and it left a mark on him. When the United Nations were formed, he sat on the steps of the Palais Chieough, where they had their first meetings, and said, "I declare this whole thing a farce, that the only way this will be a United Nations is if everybody denounces their nationality, eliminates all national borders, and sets up a world government. Then we won't kill each other." For some reason the American press ignored it. I never even heard of it until I got there.

The American press played it down, but anywhere you went in Europe, **Gary Davis** was a hero. He was the *epitome* of what everybody dreamed of, the people who were occupied by **Hitler** and actually went through that. You see, the Americans didn't *feel* the War. He felt it when he bombed Dresden. So, he set up a thing called World Government, and it was through Gary, whom I met in a cafe in Paris, that I met **Harry Harrison.** He introduced us. Harry was like the vice president, his name was on the money. He was a charter member of the World Government. And the people who *belonged* to World Government, that were signatories, were incredible! **Gandhi! Nehru!** A lot of Germans! In fact, the West German government *recognized* Gary as a legitimate government, and that's where he printed his money.

But he later turned it into a farce, he kept demeaning this thing. He would cross borders without a passport, because he said passports were illegal. He tried to return his passport and denounce his American citizenship, and the FBI or the CIA *kidnapped* him and *forcibly* brought him back to the United States — and then, of course, without a passport he couldn't get onto a plane. They guarded every airport in the U.S. He finally stowed away on a ship and went back to Europe. But he would cross borders, test the legality, and be thrown into prison. And Harry got me to put up or shut up, you know. "You talk liberalism, principles . . ." and before I knew it I was helping Gary, smuggling him across borders. I was a *drinking* buddy of the police chief of the town I lived in, and he came to me one day and said, "You've got to leave, France." Because I had helped smuggle Gary out.

And Gary, all of the people that helped him, the first thing he did was some showboat thing which made the headlines! It embarrassed the French that he had escaped France, so I *had* to leave France. I loved it in the south of France. I moved down to Capri where **Harry Harrison** was just leaving. Gary was put in a concentration camp in Italy, and then his father got him out and they brought him back to the States and then he pulled some other fool stunt. Years later I was sitting in a restaurant downstairs from my studio at the Hotel Des Artiste, I heard this guy talking, and it was Gary. I said something funny to him about World Government or something, got no response. Then I elbowed him, and he turned around and looked at me for awhile as though he didn't know me. Finally he said, "Oh, yeah, I remember you now." I had taken him in when they kicked him out of Paris, he lived with me, I was subjected to French Secret Service searching my car, coming in with guns because **Gary Davis** was living with me

to Capri where Harry Harrison was just leaving."

HE WROTE THAT SCI-FI STORY ABOUT THE GARBAGE MEN TAKING OVER THE WORLD!
FUNNY BOOK! VERY FUNNY BOOK!
HE MOCKS THE HOLY SCRIPTURE! BLASPHEMY!

HARI-HARI (sci-fi writer Harry Harrison) in the 7/14/89 FLASH strip.

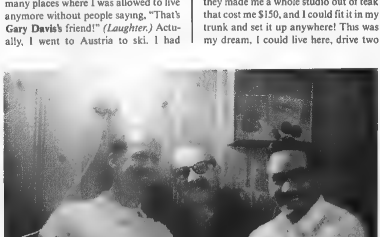
— and ten years later he doesn't know me! Not only that, he tried to sell me a water softener. *(Laughter.)* That's what he had gone to.

Anyway, that's how I ended up in Austria, because there were not too many places where I was allowed to live anymore without people saying, "That's **Gary Davis's** friend!" *(Laughter.)* Actually, I went to Austria to ski. I had learned. I lived out of the back of my station wagon, because I'd move to a country and set up — I had a portable studio that mounted on a wall. The Danish were great at doing modular things. I went to a factory up there and they made me a whole studio out of teak that cost me $150, and I could fit it in my trunk and set it up anywhere! This was my dream. I could live here, drive two hours and go skiing, another hour and you're swimming — but I never got to do any of those things! I went skiing for a week with my friends from Paris, then spent the next five weeks trying to catch up on a deadline.

RICK: *I've noticed in FLASH GORDON when he's in outer space a lot of the time . . . it's just sort of like you don't care about outer space. But put him on skis, the strip takes off. (Laughter.)*

DAN: Well, I really wanted to learn how to ski, and the only way I could do it was to live there, right on the slopes. So I went up to Austria, traveled by train, looked around, and just by chance someone said they had a house for rent in Kitzbuhel. I said, "Wait a minute, I'm getting pretty far afield, I've got to send my strips in." They said I shouldn't worry, the mail in Austria is very reliable, and they were right. I had learned beforehand from guys who went to Europe on vacation and sent stuff back that it could get lost in Customs for three or four months, so I was at least circumspect enough.

I went to the Customs people and explained what I was going to be doing and asked, "Is there a way to avoid my stuff going through Customs?" They said, "No, it has to go through Customs, but you can avoid any delays. Mark it 'Original Artwork of a U.S. Citizen Living Abroad.' Mark it and write a form



Gary Davis (L), Post-WWII founder of WORLD GOVERNMENT — which attracted such "citizens" as Gandhi, Nehru, Schweitzer, etc., meets with "aides" Harry Harrison (M) and Dan . . . somewhere in Europe, about 1960.

"I went to the Customs people and asked, is there a way to

Harry Harrison — on Dan's balcony on Capri (circa 1959).

that says you did it this is your work; in other words that you're not *importing* artwork, it's your own artwork, you're just sending it to someone." And they gave me the form number, and that's how you get by the red tape. So, I had a declaration printed that went in every one of my packages. It said, "Form 1022: Enclosed, Artwork of a U.S. Artist Living Abroad," and *that* got the strips right through. It would come into Customs and the moment they got it, they'd pass it out that day.

RICK: *Did you have to destroy the originals after copies were made? A foreign artist who sends material into the United States has to destroy the original to avoid paying an import duty on artwork.*

DAN: *I didn't know that, you have to destroy the art or pay an import fee?*

DAN: Oh, but there's no import on an American artist living abroad.

RICK: *Alberto Giolitti, who was doing TUROK, SON OF STONE, was an Italian artist, and you never see his original art for sale because there was a choice, pay an import duty on it or destroy the original. The import duty was probably not that much, but the original art wasn't any good to them once they had photographed it, so they destroyed it. He lived in Italy, he sent the original art —*

DAN: He sent the originals?

RICK: *He sent the originals to the United States.*

DAN: Well, how do they prove they destroyed it?

RICK: *Evidently they filled out forms saying they did. (Laughter.)*

DAN: *That's the story of government — forms.*

DAN: But . . . what was I going to say? **Harry Harrison.** I never really was into science fiction, but science fiction as prophesy, **Harrison** was great at it. He had a story, I don't know if you remember it, and I don't remember the name of it — I only read science fiction thinking, "What can I use?" *(Laughter.)* Either I can use it or I can't. He had a story where the garbagemen, in the social strata, were the rulers of the world. The Earth had expanded in size with the layers of compacted garbage. It turns out to be prophetic. It was, you know, a couple of thousand years down the line, human population growth had taken its toll.

So *many* novels had been written about this population growth and what the consequences would be, but *only* Harry could think of the really one primal consequence, waste cycling. Natural resources, everyone thought about diminishing supplies. Nobody thought about the increasing defecation, and Harry was just the guy to think of it. I hadn't seen Harry in awhile, I hadn't seen any of his output, didn't know what he was doing, and I walked by a bookstore and there was this great big poster for this book GREAT BALLS OF FIRE. It turned out it was **Harry Harrison,** an anthology on science-fiction sexuality. *(Laughter.)* He was marvelous.

RICK: *I tried to engage in conversation with him once —*

DAN: He's kind of walrus looking — he'd look a little bit like you, Dave, if you were puffed out. *(Laughter.)* And Harry — I told you about the French Canadian who couldn't speak English or French — Harry you had a hard time understanding in *any* language. He'd speak very fast. He could read a book in an hour, he could write one in a half-hour, and he could *tell* it to you in fifteen minutes. *(Laughter.)* And he was kind of a gruff bear, you know. His wife was about 4'3" and maybe 80 pounds soaking wet — and we were talking about our wives one day and Harry described her, he turned to me and said, "80 pounds of pure poison." And she was. *(Laughter.)*

Harry had this little tyrant. She fed him stuff, I'm sure the menu was from **Lucrezia Borgia's** cookbook, and Harry would talk about her great cooking. He'd keep inviting people to come over, and after the first time they were always busy. *(Laughter.)* It was unbelievable! But Harry ate it, and Harry stuck with her. She would lock him in his room and nobody could get at him, when he had to work. He absolutely needed it. **Frank Frazetta** was the same way, needed somebody to make him work.

RICK: *Everybody complains about Frazetta's wife, because she won't let him give away artwork for free, won't let him do drawings for fans free.*

DAN: Frazetta's wife *made* him!

RICK: *Yes, exactly, that's what he needed. Now, you said that you had felt ashamed of being a comics writer. Theodore Sturgeon, one of the greatest*

avoid my stuff (artwork) going through Customs — No."

science-fiction writers of all time, gave a speech at the Chicago WorldCon many years ago — he said, "I come here to this convention and for three days I'm a hero and everybody comes up and wants my autograph, but the checkout boy at the supermarket still sneers at me because I write science fiction."

DAN: Well, let me put this into context of where I was at. I had been married very very young, nineteen, and it was a terrible marriage. She made my life miserable, and *I* made my life miserable. There were a lot of complications; I had married to get the hell out of my neighborhood, to get away from my family, to get out of that poverty. She represented respectability. But I had been raised on reading the classics, and when I was twelve I won a scholarship to an art school on Saturdays in Greenwich Village, the American Artists School. There were people like **Raphael Soyer** teaching there, and **Gropper,** who isn't too famous but he was *the* political cartoonist for THE DAILY WORKER

you don't dare mention *that* these days. *(Laughter.)* Highly regarded by other artists. **Ben Shawn.** A really terrific school.

Anyway, on those Saturdays I'd walk around the Village, and it was like right out of the novels I was reading: artists sitting around cafes having intellectual discussions. It was my dream. And then I went and got married and moved out to Long Island. I wanted to move to New York; she wouldn't because you can't raise kids there, that kind of thing. After my divorce, I moved into New York, the Village, a cellar apartment. Suddenly here I was, *living* in this world of BOHEME, and still impressionable. I was no longer a kid, and yet I was just being born. I was 29, and *finally* was thrown into an intellectual circle with poets, artists, musicians. In retrospect, I realize *I* was making *money* — these guys were better than I and weren't being published. Deep inside I wanted to be the poet —

RICK: *And you can't be the poet if you're making money.*

DAN: Well, you can't do it working for comic books. I felt inferior. At least the strip gave me a chance to do my own thing. I tried to do it in a way that wouldn't insult *me* if I were the reader. I couldn't go back to the Mongo stuff. Years later I capitulated, but I never used Mongo until —

RICK: *Around '55 or '56.*

DAN: Oh, no no no, come on. Did I? That soon?

RICK: *Yeah. They teleported back to Mongo, these beings in the cowls —*

DAN: Okay, and even then I did it reluctantly. I guess it was after five years of not getting a raise when I said, "To hell with it. I'll give you **Alex Raymond** if that's what you want." But my feeling was, you know, I couldn't handle all of these characters that made no sense to me. Do you remember the sequence where I gave Zarkov a wife and daughter? They yelled Ike I'd ruined the strip! I was doing what people claim was the reason **Stan Lee** was successful in his comic books, that he made his people fallible and he gave them dimension and all this stuff. I was doing that.

RICK: *When Dale looks at Flash in that 1960 sequence and says, "I've been waiting for you for ten years. I'm tired of waiting! I'm going to get married and raise a family!" I wanted to applaud, good for her!*

DAN: I've never known quite what to do with Dale. I've *made* her *something.* I've changed it, sometimes she's an ecologist, sometimes something else, but she *does* something. Dale, in the old strip, *offended* me every time she appeared.

From the 2nd week of FLASH's "The Matter Transmitter" story line — 6/12/89.

"She'd kick 'em in the balls! *(Laughter.)*"

One-paneled episode of FLASH from 6/22/89 by Dan.

Somebody in a critique said it so perfectly, like I wish *I'd* said it: Dale, you could picture her 20 years down the line, MAGGIE AND JIGGS. *(Laughter.)*

RICK: *Yeah, that's so true.*

DAN: Harvey Kurtzman on the evening when I first met him — he claims in the Kitchen Sink Press collection that he was always a FLASH GORDON fan we were talking about **Raymond,** and **Jerry Robinson** talking about his buddyship with **Hogarth.** We were talking about Burne that night and Jerry said, "Burne's not an artist, he's a designer." Because he did these decorative compositions, he's not an artist, just a designer. And I'll never forget Harvey saying, "FLASH GORDON? Does anybody *read* it? The only thing I use it for is to go to the bathroom and jerk off." *(Laughter.)* I was shocked because I didn't think **Alex Raymond's** women were sexy at all. On the contrary.

RICK: *Alex did, oh yes, very sexy. The Ice Queen of Frigia turned me on for years. (Laughter.)*

DAN: *Sexy* women were **Caniff's.** The one thing Sylvan said that I can remember, in all of the years, that I think was right on, was that **Caniff's** women are prettier than pretty women. When I was on Guam and hadn't seen a woman for two years, we would get MALE CALL.

Hoo!! He made women exciting!

JULIA: *I think the person who takes the cake with sexy women has to be Milo Manara.*

RICK: *Oh, yes!*

DAN: Who?

JULIA: *Manara, the French artist.*

RICK: *Hard X but really beautifully drawn and very sexy.*

DAN: Well, MODESTY BLAISE was the forerunner of all that. MODESTY BLAISE was a comic strip in which, you know, she got undressed every day. And she'd always get caught in the bath, and he'd have her fighting naked. And this was 30 years ago in the English press.

RICK: *There would be two gunmen waiting in the hall for her and she'd know this, so she'd take off her blouse and she'd go out in the hall and the two gunmen would drop their guns on the floor —*

DAN: — and she'd kick 'em in the balls! *(Laughter.)* It was unbelievable, this stuff that they were doing — but *beautifully* drawn. I mean, mouth watering illustration! **Alex Raymond** had a file of his stuff, he studied it. But Alex himself was not a sexy guy. He was very suave, urbane. But not sexy. It was tragic, but it was so fitting, that the way he died was trying out his new Mercedes 360. And you know who was in the car with him?

RICK: *I forget.*

DAN: Stan Drake. Stan wasn't wearing the seatbelt and was thrown clear, and Alex was wearing his. Stan said they were only doing about 40 or less, but they were on a low street — it was in a city — and so Alex dropped into second gear to accelerate up the hill, and he hit a slick of water at the top of the hill. Mercedes are the worst bloody cars. I bought three of them when I lived in Europe, for friends in the States, and I warned my friends — but they still wanted them. I bought them, drove them around for a year, then brought them over and they'd pay me whatever it had cost me plus my expenses for the trip.

I almost got killed in all three with safety hazards. One, the brakes wouldn't work no matter what you did to them. I lived right there in Munich where they had one of the biggest Mercedes workshops. They kept telling me I was stupid, they really said that. "You're stupid, this is a Mercedes." I couldn't believe it. They fixed it in Denmark for free. These brakes were never going to work, they had to take the whole system out and replace it. Another one wouldn't steer, you would steer it too far left and it would jam. The best car I ever had was a Mini Cooper. *(Laughter.)* A Cooper is a *racing* engine, and they put it in a little mini-minor with a 12" wheel, and the steering wheel is like a bicycle, and I could turn a circle around this table – it was like riding a bicycle, it *took* curves.

JULIA: *My first car was a Mini Cooper, they're very low to the ground.*

DAN: Low, 12". It's a little box, the aerodynamics aren't there — but that *engine!* I could take curves at about 110, and I mean whooshing curves, and it never skidded — just enough tail skid to use, that was it.

"I did this story about the guy that was the first to Mars."

RICK: *I've got a FLASH GORDON sequence for you. Flash Gordon is in a spacesuit and this is Monday, and way back there you've got a monolith or something, really tiny, and you have: UNGH-NGHU UNGH-NGHU UNGH-NGHU. Then Tuesday exactly the same thing —*

DAN: How do you spell that?

RICK: *Only the monolith is about that much bigger.*

DAN: Yeah, but how do you spell that?

RICK: *HUHNNNHUNA. So Tuesday Flash Gordon's still there doing something, and the monolith is now a little bigger: UNGH-NGHU UNGH-NGHU UNGH-NGHU. The monolith is just a little bit taller in each panel.*

DAN: I think it needs a GH to do what you said. *(Laughter.)* Maybe UNGHGHU.

RICK: *Everybody is going to be picking up the paper just to see how long you're going to dare to go on with this — Wednsday, Thursday, Friday. Finally Friday in the last panel the monolith WHAM! Hits him from behind and he goes tumbling over! That's the kind of thing that would really grab people. They'd say, "How can this guy get away with drawing the same thing every day?" But the next day they're going to pick up the paper to see if you're still drawing it!*

DAN: You know what, I did that somewhat.

RICK: *Really? What did you do?*

DAN: I did something similar. I did this story about this famous guy that was the first guy on Mars. It happened to be one of those times when I got married again. *(Laughter.)*

GAIL: His life goes in phases, from marriage to marriage.

DAN: I remember very clearly, I had to take these strips with me on my honeymoon. We rented a little cabin in Chamonix, France, that was two stories but about six foot by six foot, there was a bedroom upstairs, downstairs a kind of a little kitchen. It was a great little place. But I had to rig up a drawing board and I was doing this Mars thing. When they find this guy he's a hermit, antisocial, and his house has all these security devices — Flash goes to meet him and he's almost shot, he can't get in to see him! It turns out that, on his first trip to Mars, he got separated from his ship and had this feeling of *falling* through space. The moment night comes, the moment darkness comes, he turns on all of his lights, has to strap himself into a chair — and he doesn't want anyone to see him this way, because he's still going through this nightmare of eternally falling through space. Even his daughter hasn't seen him since she was yea high. He just doesn't want anybody to know, he just can't face anyone.

I had left it at that point just at that week, which explains his psychosis. But I'm on my honeymoon, I've got to turn out a week of stuff! *(Laughter.)* So, for a whole week I kept this thing going, falling falling falling. It was a gag between Jutta and me. She'd look at what I was doing, "He's still falling, he's *still* fucking falling!" *(Laughter.)*

RICK: *I remember you used to do big letters that would be really eye-catching, like the letters would be the whole strip practically, with all of these figures.*

DAN: That was in the early stages. Do you know I don't have any of those originals.

RICK: *Really? They did a beautiful book of those.*

DAN: Kitchen Sink. I hadn't *seen* any of those strips until that was reprinted. **Kitchen** got the strips from **Harvey Kurtzman** who had a complete collection of my stuff. There were about twenty years when King weren't sending me my stuff, and by the time I asked for them they said, "We haven't got them, you've got them!" I have a feeling there was someone in the shipping room that liked my stuff, and was keeping it or selling it or something.

RICK: *King Features gets ripped off so badly, and if they don't get ripped off, somebody comes in who is a new editor and throws it in the trash.*

DAN: They have a policy, according to **Chilino,** who is head of production there, that after so many months they automatically ship it back. I never got them back!

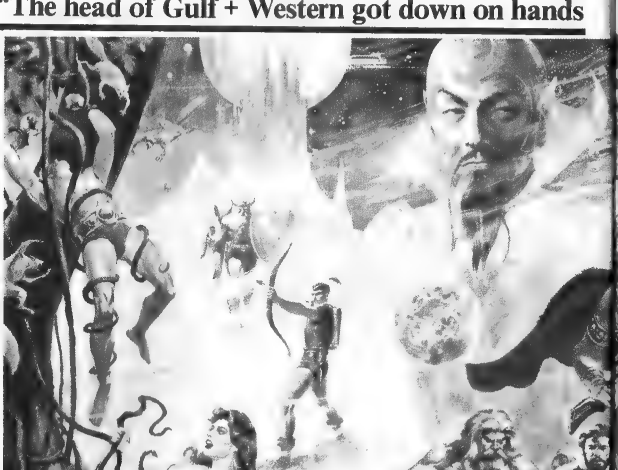
RICK: *I tried to get reprint rights to old strips from them, I was going to pay them money, and they didn't have the proofs, they threw them away.*

GAIL: My God.

DAN: This is something I wanted to show you, it's the poster from the FLASH GORDON movie from which they were *originally* supposed to run a contest, a talent search. Paramount paid me for this and it never got used. In the two years that elapsed between this and the making of the film, Dino did HURRICANE — for which I also did that poster — but they split, Paramount decided they had had enough of Dino, so they didn't distribute the movie, and he couldn't use the poster. Dino was shrewd, he would hire me but he wouldn't pay me — he would send me to Paramount to talk money, they paid me. He used the artwork without paying me, on a number of his promotion pieces. This would be the big centerfold. Well, I didn't want to get involved suing the guy, I didn't know whom to sue him for what.

DAK: *I heard recently that they may finally be out of the movie production business, the De Laurentiises. I think they finally are calling it quits.*

"The head of Gulf + Western got down on hands



A more recent presentation painting for Dino De Laurentiis' Flash Gordon movie.

DAN: He opened a movie center here in Carolina, didn't he?

DAK: *Yeah, in South Carolina, they have production facilities in South Carolina — or they did.*

DAN: And you think they're giving it up?

DAK: *Probably they've sold out. What I never could figure out was how could anybody produce so many bad movies and stay in business. It puzzled me. If his name is on the movie, it's a guarantee that the movie is not going to be any good.*

DAN: It's a stinker. But when he was in Europe it was just the opposite. He's the guy who discovered **Fellini** and produced all of the **Fellini** movies. He did BICYCLE THIEF, can you believe it!

DAK: *Amazing! I was in Times Square for the premiere of the first CONAN — because I'd been working on the CONAN book at Marvel, I had passes — everybody gets to their seats and the credits start rolling, and there's polite applause at Schwarzenegger's name, and so on, and as the different credits come up — until Dino De Laurentiis's name comes on, when there are boos and hisses from the people he has invited to the premiere. (Laughter.)*

DAN: Well, I worked with Dino personally. He called me, I had to go to see

and knees. He wrote a blank check for the movie."

him. Posters aren't done that way! Paramount has an ad agency, right, and they do the posters. Sometimes a poster artist would come up to see Rose at Paramount, but otherwise Rose never saw the artists. They had all of these top names, **Bob Peak, Fuchs,** all these guys, and I had an inferiority complex bringing this thing up. But it created a sensation. The head of Gulf and Western got down on his hands and knees to *look* at it! That's when he wrote the blank check for the movie! **Bildhorn** said, "You've got the greatest thing yet, in *all* of this science fiction stuff!" He put his finger on it. He said, "You've got the new, the future, and the old combined. Don't forget, that's what you do."

And Dino missed the mark. You know, the photography was this murky stuff — after STAR WARS and you've got $40 million, why fuck around, hire **Lucas** to do the special effects. He would have done it for the money. But no, he hired some new outfit. Wouldn't you agree? But, as I was finishing this, they were getting ready to release *this* and he was already having problems. He said, "Could you do the same thing for me on HURRICANE that you did there?" Well, it turned out to be a nightmare. I have 40 sheaves of drawings of all of the changes he made on it. He said, "Now

"Stan Lee was unable to tell me how to draw

remember, it's not going to be a disaster movie," on and on.

Stan Lee pulled the same stuff with me on SPIDER-MAN (talk about imitative and market-conscious)! **Stan Lee** never was satisfied with the drawing of Peter Parker. In one breath, he'd ask me to tell **Floro Dery** how to draw Peter; in the next, he'd want me to change *my* interpretation. **Romita's** Peter was "not quite it," neither was **Kida's**. "In fact, Dan, nobody's had him just right yet. Make him look a little like **Michael J. Fox.**" (What? Last week, he was too young. Make him more mature, manly. Now **Michael J. Fox?**) Stan was trying to emulate anything that was popular on TV. He was jumping hoops.

HURRICANE was the same story. Dino: "It's not a disaster movie, it's a love story." So I did drawings of love scenes, of the leads swimming under the water, romancing, poetic, idyllic, all of these things — and Dino'd veto them. By the time his final decision came down, it was a disaster movie. *(Laughter.)* You know what he did? He went to Bora Bora because he remembered it as the only unspoiled island in the whole Tahiti chain, and he immediately spoiled it. And he used this thing, the FLASH GORDON poster, in ways I couldn't believe. He had people in from Holland, and every time I was waiting to see him there was this *parade* of international financiers. That's what he would show them for a movie. I did this from a tape the guy he had hired to write and direct it had done, and all the tape said was, "Well, I'm going to make it look like **Frank Frazetta."** *(Laughter.)* I wish they had. Did it look like **Frank Frazetta?**

RICK: *It looked like the old black-and-white serials.*

DAN: And if it *were* black-and-white it would have been better. The photography was misty.

RICK: *Yeah, it was very crude, very cheap looking — I don't know why I enjoyed it so much. (Laughter.)*

DAN: Ah, I think you were reading camp into it when they were doing it *straight!*

RICK: *No, I hate camp. You can't get extremely serious about that, because if you start thinking about it, you think, "What is he doing with a sword when he's got a ray gun?"*

DAN: But **Jones** . . . I mean, *I* could have played Flash better than that! He

The original pencils to the 9/12/86 SPIDER-MAN strip. The finished inks.

DAILY BUGLE
SPIDER-MAN WANTED FOR DRUG PUSHING
Bugler Publisher J. Jonah Jameson proclaims, "We always said he was a menace! Our editorials have been vindicated."
J. JONAH JAMESON
SPIDER-MAN
ISN'T THAT A LITTLE STRONG, JJ? THE WEB-SWINGER HASN'T BEEN CONVICTED YET.
HE WILL BE IF I HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY ABOUT IT!
SPORTS EXTR
DAILY

Peter Parker. He told me what not to draw."

has a funny ineffective voice. They asked me who would make an ideal Flash Gordon, I said **Redford**. If you're going to spend $40 million, you can afford to get **Redford.** They said, "Oh, no, we can't afford **Redford.** Besides, he's too old." **Redford** would have been a *perfect* Flash Gordon. And then he hires **Lorenzo Semple, Jr.** I said, "Let *me* write the goddamn movie." I don't know what he had against me writing the script.

He *insisted* on my doing the poster because he liked *my* strip. Paramount kept saying, "Don't use a cartoonist to do the poster." He insisted, and it was *his* poster — I mean, he was involved from the beginning. To tell you the truth, I got so sick of it, I never would have finished it without **Bob Fujitani** helping me. It went on for two years! He kept changing!

JAMESON'S ALREADY FOUND ME GUILTY IN HIS PAPER! HE'S TURNING THE WHOLE CITY AGAINST ME!
MARY JANE! WHAT WILL SHE THINK?
© 1989 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.
JAMESON'S ALREADY FOUND ME GUILTY IN HIS PAPER! HE'S TURNING THE WHOLE CITY AGAINST ME!
MARY JANE! WHAT WILL SHE THINK?

And compositionally it was the greatest challenge I've ever had, because they wanted to do it as a three-page foldout in LIFE MAGAZINE. I had to have three vertical compositions that were independent of one another, and yet *flowed*. That is *murder* to do! To make them work vertically is fine, but then to give them a flow was murder! I worked on it for *months!*

And I kept having to go into Paramount and say, "I'm sorry, boys, he threw out another month's work." And at that I was probably making $10 an hour, *if* that. He found out it would have to have an R rating with all of the gore and so on, so he threw that all out. You see, all he's thinking is market. You ask how he stayed in business — he makes deals with these European distributors who buy it, so he's got a profit no matter how bad it is. That's how he got away with it. He was just interested in showing something he could sell to the market.

But look at all of the people he's misused. He gets this terrific cast for that Brinks robbery film he made, **Peter Falk** and all those guys, and . . . I mean, it takes a *genius* to get a bad performance out of **Peter Falk!** *(Laughter.)* Another thing I'll tell you, I could have done the HURRICANE poster in two weeks. I went out to Hollywood to get research on it. I went to Paramount to negotiate money. They gave me a contract for $5,000 up front, $25,000 when the movie was released, in the European market another $35,000 — because they'd *had* these experiences before, they'd pay for a poster and then he'd change his mind, want something else, and they didn't use the poster — $60,000 I had wrapped up in this. I put in four months of my time. I was hiring other guys to do my strips, and I wound up just making the $5,000 for four months work. I paid out $20,000 in help! It cost me $15,000 to do this poster!

He promised to send me to Bora Bora, that's why I *took* the job. And he reneged. The movie's about to be released, he's got a scene showing a ship crashing into a church, and he doesn't know what kind of ship. He takes out a book and says it's a gunboat. A gunboat is a generic term for anything with guns that floats. "What kind of a boat are you using?" He couldn't get me a picture, didn't have a still. "Do you have a shot of how you handled this in the movie?" No. About three months after I did the poster, they sent me about three boxes of slides which *obviously* were taken while the movie was being shot, *months* before I did this job. I *made* him get a copy of the old **Jon Hall** movie, rent me a projectionist for the afternoon, and I watched the old **Jon Hall** movie. And he said, "This is not going to be anything like that!" That was bull *(Laughter.)* I couldn't have done it without that.

DAK: *Did the movie FLASH GORDON do anything at all for the syndicated strip?*

DAN: I don't think so.

RICK: *Kenz didn't promote the strip. They could have signed up 100 papers on the basis of the movie alone.*

DAN: They got a million bucks flat cash from Dino for the rights.

RICK: *How much did you get?*

DAN: Nothing. I said, "How about 0.5 percent, $50,000, as a token for all of the fucking years I've put in on this thing?" I mean, for *years* I was making $300 a week, and a comic-book letterer was making more than that. For years I couldn't get a raise, in fact it wasn't until after **Byck** retired that I got my raise. I tried to goose them to use this movie to promote the strip. Nothing. Paramount, *they* treated me like a king — anything I asked them for, bango.

Incidentally, when this Dino offer came along, I had just had an exhibit of my paintings somewhere and had had a real bad time with an art dealer. I had this interview with Dino. It was like red carpet, in a penthouse suite. Very flattering. Then you go to the art galleries and they talk about artists like they're nothing. Ironic. One thing I did not appreciate about **Stan Lee,** the way he talks about artists. All artists were morons. I finally had to say to him, "Stan, I'll spot you *at least* 50 points on any IQ test." *(Laughter.)* Do all writers feel that way?

DAK: *A lot of them do, yeah.*

DAN: Artists feel that way about writers.

DAK: *When you've done your plot three or four times, made 10,000 changes to satisfy the editor of the week and then it's given to an artist to draw in the Marvel style where you dialogue it later, what you get back sometimes bears no resemblance to your plot. You say, "Well, didn't they read it? What were they drawing? What is this?"*

DAN: Yeah, but how many of those pages do they have to do a week to make a living? Gail, probably rightfully, says, "You don't like anybody." *(Laughter.)* Of course she had heard me complaining about **Bob Fujitani,** who is a *brilliant* artist.

GAIL: Except on your work. *(Laughter.)*

DAN: No. What I was complaining

FLASH AND KENOMA, DRUGGED OUT OF THEIR SENSES, GO AT EACH OTHER FOR NO GOOD REASON...
WITH EACH BLOW, BLIND RAGE BUILDS TO A DEADLY FURY!
6-26
GOOD GRIEF KOZY! TH-THEY'RE KILLING EACH OTHER!
DON'T KNOCK IT, SKURVY...
IF THEY CAN'T REMEMBER THEY'RE FRIENDS, THE DRUGS ARE WORKING!
THEY WON'T REMEMBER THE EVIDENCE THEY UNCOVERED!
FLASH AND KENOMA ARE THE ONLY LIVE WITNESSES AGAINST US!
WE WON'T CRY IF THEY DO KILL EACH OTHER!
6-27
I MUST SAY, FLASH AND KENOMA ARE EVENLY MATCHED!
GOOD, SKURVY! PERHAPS NEITHER WILL SURVIVE!
THUD
THEY'RE BREAKING THROUGH THE LOCKED DOOR! RUN, KOZY... RUN!
6-28
OMIGOSH! THEY'VE BROKEN THROUGH THE DOOR!
GET OUT BEFORE THEY SEE US!
AND TURN THEIR DRUG-SOAKED ANGER OUR WAY!
BUT KOZY AND SKURVY ARE TOO LATE! AT SIGHT OF THEM, KENOMA STOPS SHORT...!
HOLD IT! COOL IT, MAN!
?!
6-29

Dan's FLASH GORDON with Bob Fujitani on the art — 1972.

about with Bob was when I wrote my stories I did them in sketch *plus* description, and Bob by then was so sick of the script — and I don't blame him, he was just grinding them out, and he was doing the hard work back then; I was doing maybe the Sunday page, sometimes he would do them all — so he would change things. There were times when the change left the *point* of the strip hard to understand.

RICK: *How often the reader and the artist are at cross purposes. The reader wants the artist to wake up in the morning and labor on the strip for fourteen hours and then go to bed that night, and that way he has something beautiful to read in his morning paper. The artist, on the other hand, may not see it in quite the same way.*

DAK: *He wants to play tennis in the afternoon. (Laughter.)*

DAN: Well, the artist wishes that he was drawing BC. *(Laughter.)*

NEXT ISSUE: The final action-packed part, featuring Dan Barry's true-life tales of skiing with the Shah of Iran and using friend and famous film actor Kirk Douglas to model for Flash Gordon, plus lots more. Don't miss it!

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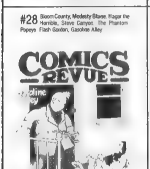

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"These publishers are sitting on their asses

BERNIE MIREAULT

I've known Bernie Mireault for almost ten years, going back to the time when we hung out at the same comic shop in the early 1980s. Later, I became publisher of his work in such titles as NEW TRIUMPH, MACKENZIE QUEEN and THE JAM.

I've always had a special perception of Bernie. In a field full of neurotics, Bernie always seemed remarkably self-contained and maintained a kind of invulnerable, cheerful optimism and a genuine concern for other people. Finally, in a field full of clones and copiers and hacks, Bernie always demonstrated a remarkable originality, a style that is influenced *by Kirby and Eisner and Kurtzman and the Hernandez Bros., but has always been unmistakably his own.*

I joined Bernie at his place, along with his friends and collaborators Joe Matt and Patrick McKeown, to talk about life, GRENDEL, comics, Canada and tape recorders.

MARK SHAINBLUM: *Okay, we're sitting here in a room with Bernie Mireault, Joe Matt, Patrick McKeown — and I'm the only one hese who has not or will not work on GRENDEL.*

BERNIE MIREAULT: We want to talk about what we think the character is, because he's very vague and open to interpretation.

MARK: *Let's start with Joe — because Joe's been working with Matt Wagner the longest.*

JOE MATT: Well, Bernie got on issue #13.

MARK: *Weren't you coloring it before?*

JOE: I just colored three covers by the Pander Brothers.

BERNIE: But you've known **Matt Wagner** for a lot longer?

JOE: Yeah, I met him in college in the fall of '81. We went to the Philadelphia College of art.

MARK: *What was Matt like then?*

JOE: We're gonna talk about Matt?

MARK: *Well, if we're going to talk about GRENDEL, we can't avoid talking about Matt Wagner.*

JOE: Well, he was always a cartoonist. Even when he drew from life it always came out kind of dynamic looking and powerful and sturdy. He was one of the only guys in college to already have a look to his work before he got there. Everything Matt did always had his personality.

Below and next page: Some of Bernie's work from Stephen Bissette's TABOO #1.

All artwork accompanying this interview ©1989 Bernie Mireault, unless otherwise noted.

on top of the work, hiding it from us."

MARK: *The basic premise of GRENDEL, less so MAGE I suppose, is aggression. The quest for the answers to human rage. Does that come from Matt's personality?*

JOE: It's exactly the flip-side of MAGE. MAGE is this reluctant hero. It's Matt basically telling people to get off their asses and do something worthwhile with their lives. In that respect, Kevin Matchstick is really him. GRENDEL is the opposite of that. It's about a guy who is *hardly* reluctant to stir things up, and he does it in a negative way. It's another side of the same coin.

MARK: *Yin/yang?*

JOE: Yeah. Matt calls GRENDEL his playground and he thinks of MAGE more as his . . . his . . .

BERNIE: Masterwork?

JOE: Right.

MARK: *I've known Bernie for a long time, Joe somewhat less, but I don't think of rage or aggression or anger as part of your work. Either of you. Both of you draw in a very idiosyncratic, personal way, and it's not the first thing I associate with what you do.*

JOE: Well, first of all, people reading this aren't going to be familiar with my work at all because I only had a few pages in Kitchen Sink's SNARF.

MARK: *Well, they* should *be. Read SNARF! Read Joe Matt's work!*

JOE: It's autobiographical stuff and hopefully **Denis Kitchen** will put a collection out when I get it done. SNARF doesn't sell really big numbers and I'm sure 99% of the people reading this won't even know what my stuff is. It's really influenced by the undergrounds. **Crumb, Spiegelman, Pekar** . . .

MARK: *Is there some reason for the direction you've taken? Is autobiography more interesting for you?*

JOE: It's autobiographical because my upbringing was Catholic.

MARK: *That's a good excuse! "I do autobiographical comics because my upbringing was Catholic!"*

JOE: Because of that Catholic upbringing I have a deep-seated need to confess. So I relate to **Crumb** in that respect.

BERNIE: And autobiography is what you do when you're looking for direction. It's already written.

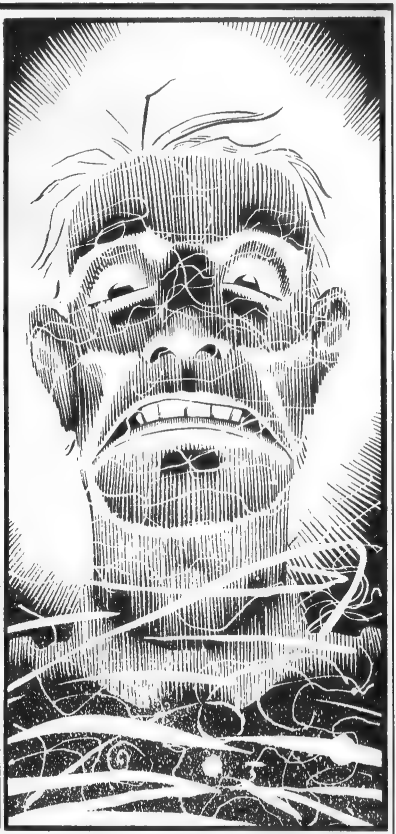
JOE: I can't write to save my ass . . .

MARK: *Sure you can.*

JOE: I mean fictitious stuff. I've tried to make stuff up before and it always ended up looking stupid to me, so . . .

BERNIE: You're a picky guy.

JOE: I like doing autobiographical stuff because someday I may have kids when



"I just hung up after the fiftieth death threat."

I'm fifty or something.

MARK: *You're going to show it to them?*

JOE: It'll be great. I'd love to read something my father did when he was 25. All our parents are strangers to us when they were our age. It's all lost. They grow up and change.

BERNIE: Talking about how we ended up working on GRENDEL — when what we do when left to our own devices is so different. I think the obvious reason of course is we're doing our own stuff, floundering around going from meal to meal. Matt gives us a chance to practice our art and get paid for it, too.

MARK: *Bernie, you were aware of Matt Wagner's work even before he called you up. And when we discussed his work, there was always a sort of quasi-symbiosis between you and Matt. There were always parallels between your work and his.*

BERNIE: I was very jealous of his initial success and spent many hours putting him down to friends and family. "This guy didn't deserve a color book! Look! He doesn't even do backgrounds!"

MARK: *But it went beyond that. It was flying Volkswagens and thematic things you were doing in MACKENZIE QUEEN and he was doing in MAGE. . .*

BERNIE: And the fact that THE DEMON was my favorite Jack Kirby character and in my most opulent fanboy dreams there I was, doing THE DEMON. And then I hear Matt gets the deal to do it. At that point I wrote him a letter saying "What's going on? This is like voodoo." With GRENDEL . . okay, I've got a story. I was scared that I wasn't going to be able to get into GRENDEL, because it's very dark and the general theme for the particular story that I did was just depression. Somebody starts out low and then just gets lower and lower and lower until they're dead.

MARK: *What issues did you do?*

BERNIE: GRENDEL #13 to 15, with the character Brian. And I couldn't understand . . . I didn't have any negative feelings to put into the book. But at the time I first got the job I was trying to see this girl, and she was being pestered by an old boyfriend. One time I was over at her house, and the guy kept calling over and over again. I picked up the phone once after she was reduced to tears and I spent an hour talking with him, and that was a horrifying, bizarre conversation with what I thought was obviously a madman on the other end of the phone. I put down the phone, I just hung up after the fiftieth death threat.

MARK: *You mean he was threaten-*

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From the Grendel graphic novel THE DEVIL INSIDE.

"I felt like I was contributing to pop culture."

ing you because you were going out with her?

BERNIE: Absolutely! Lives were cheap to him, obviously. But at the end of the phone call, I was sitting there wondering what I was going to do to save this poor, beleaguered girl who has black circles beginning to form underneath her eyes. How can I convince this guy to lay off? Obviously, he's not open to reason. I'd have to *kill* him. Hmmm. Obviously, I didn't *seriously* consider that, but I realized later on that's a great deal of what Matt's talking about. Dealing with these feelings and by sort of laundering them through GRENDEL. I'm sure it's very much an outlet for him and his negative feelings.

MARK: *A catharsis. I think that's true of all artists. You meet Steve Bissette and he's the nicest, quietest, most softspoken guy you'd want to talk to, and then you read some of his stories and he's writing about people having bloody sampons shoved down their throats with their lips stitched together.*

BERNIE: *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *I want to bring Pat into the discussion. He's the newest addition to the GRENDEL roster, he's doing numbers . . .*

PAT MCKEOWN: Numbers 41 to 50

BERNIE: And I'm doing the color!

MARK: *How familiar are you with GRENDEL? How do you feel about working with Wagner?*

PAT: Well, I've always liked his stuff, from the time that I picked up MAGE #1. Later on I saw the early Grendel stuff in COMICO PRIMER and I thought it was a really neat concept. I've liked his work for quite awhile, I just never would have thought that I'd be working with him. My interest has waned in the last few years because GRENDEL has grown into this huge epic and I preferred it on a much more singular and personal level. Some of my favorite issues are the ones that Bernie did. But I think the character has come to a point now, in the ones that I'll be working on, he's a fugitive, it's come down to a much more personal level again. The storyline is still epic, but it's a really interesting concept. I think I can work with the darker side of things fairly easily.

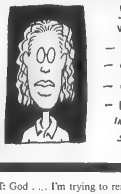
MARK: *Well, your work previously has been, how shall I put this delicately — somewhat violent, shall we say?*

JOE: Where else can we see your work?

PAT: I worked over at Aircel, which is sort of negligible.

BERNIE: Name some work that you *want* seen.

VITAL STATISTICS



JOE MATT

VITAL STATISTICS :

- BORN IN PHILADELPHIA, 1963.
- GRADUATED PHIL. COLLEGE OF ART. 1985
- COLORIST ON GRENDEL # 14,15, 20-33.
- DOES AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL COMIC STRIPS IN SNARF # 11-13 (TO BE COLLECTED SOMEDAY NEXT YEAR AS AUTOMATT.)

PAT: God . . . . I'm trying to remember. I've been doing my best to *forget* most of that. Most of my best work is unpublished, anyways.

MARK: *Everybody here has primarily been working in the small press, or the black-and-white press, I should say. Bernie did MACKENZIE QUEEN and the JAM for Marrix and he's doing THE JAM now for Slave Labor.*

JOE: Bernie's done two TABOO stories for **Steve Bissette,** and story number three that's going to come out eventually, that's great.

MARK: *What's the difference between working for a company like Marrix or Steve Bissette and working for a company like Comico?*

BERNIE: Well, a page rate, if anything. *(Laughter.)*

JOE: Working for **Steve Bissette,** you can hold your copyright. All the GRENDEL stuff is work for hire.

MARK: *Bernie's also worked for DC under work-for-hire conditions. Shall we all sit here now and pick the whole concept apart?*

BERNIE: Not really. When I worked for DC, I felt like I was contributing to pop culture in general. I did realize though that working on anything other than your own stuff is kind of silly. You've got to make compromises, though. Working only on your own stuff, sometimes it's impossible to eke out a living. One thing I wanted to mention about Matt, and one of GRENDEL's best aspects, is the fact that he's giving a lot of talented people a chance. He's not going to the old established pros. Everybody's a new, undiscovered talent.

MARK: *You showed me some of the letters that came in to GRENDEL after you started doing them . . .*

BERNIE: "Bernie must go!" followed by ten signatures. Nice.

MARK: *And the letter you got, naming no names, from someone who is now a major black-and-white comics publisher, who said something to the effect of "This*

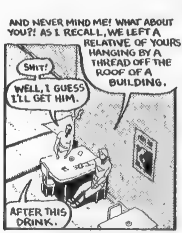
VITAL STATISTICS

Bernie E. Mireault

VITAL STATISTICS :

- BORN IN MARVILLE, FRANCE - 1961
- NO FORMAL ART TRAINING
- THREE SISTERS
- MEAT-EATING SMOKER
- LOVES COMICS
- WHAT ELSE IS THERE?
- NOT MUCH.
- HI MOM!

"I thought okay, I'm going to save these for THE


AND NEVER MIND ME! WHAT ABOUT YOU?! AS I RECALL, WE LEFT A RELATIVE OF YOURS HANGING BY A THREAD OFF THE ROOF OF A BUILDING.
SHIT!
WELL, I GUESS I'LL GET HIM.
AFTER THIS DRINK.

Above and next page: Panels from THE JAM.

is awful! I shudder to think of what a fight scene would look like!"

BERNIE: That's right. "Never again will GRENDEL rob me of my $1.50."

MARK: *This is from a man with one of the largest black-and-white lines on the market now. Makes you kinda wonder, doesn't it?*

BERNIE: It was written in pencil, too.

MARK: *This all ties into something we were discussing before we turned on the tape recorder. We were talking about Dave Sim's notion of self-publishing as the panacea, as the ultimate goal for the creator. Do you agree with that idea?*

BERNIE: I'd sure love to try it and find out for myself.

JOE: It takes a couple of thousand in the bank before you can even consider it as an option.

BERNIE: But the idea of cutting out the middle man is attractive.

JOE: That's true.

MARK: *Having* been *the middle man, on the other hand, I can tell you there's a lot of work, and there's a lot of crap that you don't realize. I'm sure DAK is sitting there editing this and nodding his head.*

PAT: If more people did it, it would be a lot easier to do and there'd be a lot more unity.

MARK: *There seems to be a trend towards it. Rick Veitch is doing it with King Hell Press. But these days, it seems to me, unless you're someone with a reputation, like Rick Veitch or Dave Sim or Steve Bissette, self-publishing is a hard row to hoe.*

JOE: It depends. It's a compromise. If you get a publisher, then you don't have to spend any time on the phone with these distributors or printers or any of that shit. You just have to talk to your publisher every now and then.

MARK: *Depends on who your publisher is, too.*

JOE: If you have a publisher you're happy with and you trust, keep doing your work and own your copyright above all.

MARK: *Absolutely. But that begs another question. All of you guys have worked on material you* didn't *own. Bernie did the Riddler story for SECRET ORIGINS. You did coloring for GRENDEL. Color is still art . . .*

JOE: I don't know. How could I hold the copyright to colors?

MARK: *Actually, it's technically impossible. But do you enjoy more working on something you own, something you have a hand in creating?*

JOE: Well, of course. *(Pause.)*

MARK: *I think I should point out here that we're all sitting staring uncomfortable at a tape recorder the size of a nuclear reactor sitting in the middle of the floor.*

JOE: I hate it. I hate this damn thing

MARK: *It's the only kind of electronics that gets* bigger *as time goes on. Everything else gets smaller.*

BERNIE: Hey, I paid a lot of money to have it that big.

JOE: I'm not going to look good at all in this interview.

BERNIE: *(Laughter.)* Joe, they can't see you.

MARK: *Getting back to GRENDEL . . .*

BERNIE: The creative freedom is absolute. It's wonderful, I think it's one of the only places in the industry you can get it.

MARK: *There have been problems, not everything has worked, but that's what you get for expe.rimenting.*

JOE: They've *all* worked, as far as I'm concerned. There's four reasons that Matt tried using single words . . .

MARK: *Oh, those are great. The Kurtzman style? Those were fantastic. I'm not talking about those at all.*

JOE: I'm not sure. The more wordy he gets, the more the fans aren't going to like it.

MARK: *The fans aren't going to like it anyway. Matt went straight from the Pander Brothers to Bernie, which is a* real *big stylistic jump. A lot of people obviously couldn't take that.*

BERNIE: Sales dropped. Significantly. Hate mail's been pouring in.

JOE: Bernie does not draw a good looking babe!

MARK: *Sure he does!*

JOE: I like the **Pander** Brothers. Bernie's women kind of look . . . uhhh . . .

MARK: *Well, I really like the Pander Brothers, too, but I thought that they went out of their way in the GINGER FOX mini-series not to draw the women like typical comic-book women.*

BERNIE: I loved that work very much. GINGER FOX was great!

JOE: Let me say something to the **Pander** Brothers if they're going to read this: You sons of bitches have got to illustrate the **Delcourt** novels, the guy who wrote DIVA. He wrote these five trashy French novels. They've been translated. NANA, DIVA, LUNA, LOLA.

MARK: *Maybe we could sell them to First as CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED.* (Laughter.)

JOE: They're perfect for the **Panders.** I keep telling them, but I don't know if they're listening.

MARK: *Joe, you have a pretty hefty body of strips built up now . . .*

JOE: Forty pages. Forty pages it took me, oh, a year and a half to do.

JAM. But that's being stingy. It's bad 'karma."

MARK: *You certainly wouldn't be making a living working for DC or Marvel at that rate.*

JOE: No. I'm glad I'm not under any pressure to do these strips, like people with contracts and a page rate and all that. I do them at my own pace with the idea that they'll all be published some day.

MARK: *You don't even do them with publication in mind. I know you did at least half of them before you even had a publishing deal.*

JOE: Yeah. I basically do them because of a need to do them, and secondly I do them to show my friends. I get Xeroxes immediately and I have to pass them out and let my friends read them all right away. It's not meant to be a thick giant book.

MARK: *And, a drumroll, we hear that that may be a possibility?*

JOE: It'll be called AUTOMATT. Hopefully, from Kitchen Sink. It's going to happen. Like I said, self-publishing is the dream. If I can save up enough money, and I try to save all my money. All the money I made off of GRENDEL I put in the bank and I'm still living off of it now, five months after I quit coloring and started doing my own strips. That's all that's important to me.

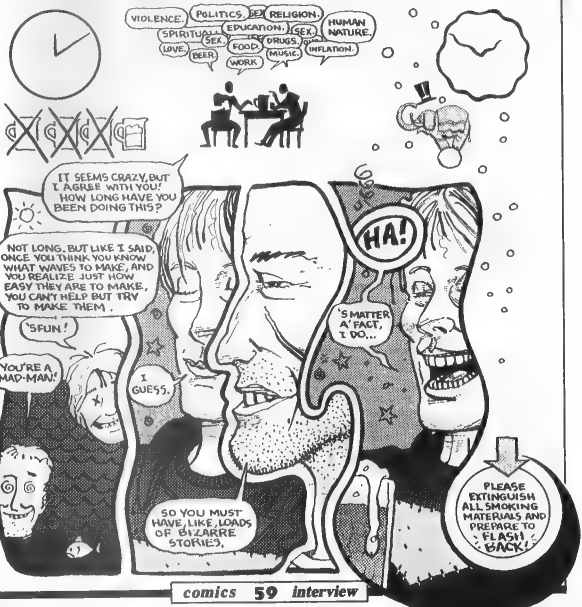
BERNIE: I've got something to say, but it's sort of off on a tangent. Joe has said about coloring that he puts his all in and experiments, because it's going to help him that much more when he does his own stuff. That's really the attitude you have to have when you're doing work-for-hire stuff. You should never hold anything back. If you get a really good idea you think "I'm going to save this for my own stuff", but really that's detrimental. You should put 100% into everything you do.

MARK: *Yes and no. If you have a really, really great idea, there always must be that sense that you don't want to give it up.*

BERNIE: When I was working on GRENDEL I was getting loads of great storytelling ideas and I thought okay, I'm going to save these for THE JAM. But then I thought, no, that's being stingy. It's "bad karma," quote unquote.

MARK: *Yeah.*

BERNIE: If I've got one idea now, I'll


VIOLENCE
POLITICS
SEX
RELIGION
SPIRITUALITY
EDUCATION
SEX
HUMAN NATURE
LOVE
BEER
FOOD
DRUGS
WORK
MUSIC
INFLATION
IT SEEMS CRAZY, BUT I AGREE WITH YOU! HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN DOING THIS?
NOT LONG, BUT LIKE I SAID, ONCE YOU THINK YOU KNOW WHAT WAVES TO MAKE, AND YOU REALIZE JUST HOW EASY THEY ARE TO MAKE, YOU CAN'T HELP BUT TRY TO MAKE THEM.
'SFUN!
YOU'RE A MAD-MAN!
I GUESS.
SO YOU MUST HAVE, LIKE, LOADS OF BIZARRE STORIES?
HA!
'S MATTER A' FACT, I DO...
PLEASE EXTINGUISH ALL SMOKING MATERIALS AND PREPARE TO FLASH BACK!

COMICS REVUE

BACK

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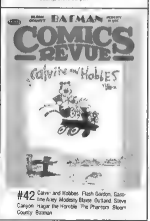

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COMICS INTERVIEW PUBLICATION

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Pat: "We're secretly planning to take over the U.S."

JUNE 20TH, 1981
NOW THEN, MR. MATT... WHAT SEEMS TO BE THE PROBLEM?
AAAAAA... IT'S THESE DAMN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STRIPS I'M DOING...
...I'M JUST SO GODDAMN SICK OF DRAWING MYSELF OVER AND OVER AGAIN! I'M GOING CRAZY!!
...AND THE WAY I DRAW MYSELF! I DON'T EVEN LOOK LIKE THAT!! I'VE GOT BIG LIPS + TEETH! BUT I'VE GOTTA DRAW MINIMALLY TO SERVE THE STORY-TELLING! THE WRITING ALWAYS COMES BEFORE THE ART!!
AND MY ART'S NOTHING MORE THAN A FORMULA! EVERY PAGE, THE SAME STUPID STYLE! THE SAME STUPID BLACK BACK-GROUNDS! I NEVER GET TO DRAW WHAT I WANT!!
WELL, WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE DRAWING?
I DUNNO... JUST SOMETHING DIFFERENT! LIKE A...A CLOWN!
I SEE
I MEAN... THE WAY I DRAW MY STRIPS, I MIGHT AS WELL BE USING RUBBER STAMPS FOR THE FACES! HOW DO OTHER CARTOONISTS DEAL WITH THIS DILEMMA?
BEATS ME...
"EXPLAINING WHAT IS FUNNY"
MAYBE THE SOLUTION IS JUST TO SIMPLY CREATE A WHOLE NEW STRIP! WITH DIFFERENT CHARACTERS AND EVERYTHING! YEEEEAHHH... I CAN DO THAT!! AND I KNOW JUST THE THING...
OBOY! ROLL IT!!

Sample of Joe Matt's "autobiographical stuff."

have a million of them

MARK: *Patrick, any plans after GRENDEL? All this talk about self-publishing . . .*

PAT: Yeah, I'd *love* to get into self-publishing. It's kind of a big hassle, but if anything, Aircel Publishing taught me. I learned about all the mistakes you can make trying to self-publish, so I know what *not* to do.

MARK: *That's what everybody thinks. There are three Canadians and an American in the room.*

JOE: That's right.

MARK: *Do you notice any difference in a comic-book sense between the two countries? Your work is actually closer to YUMMY FUR and REID FLEMING and MR. X and CEREBUS and those other few Canadian series that have become critical — if not financial — successes. The only really successful Canadian comics are non-superhero things. Your stuff is like that, low-key, autobiographical . . .*

JOE: It's just more personal. I don't know why Canadians do their own thing more than Americans do.

MARK: *Well, in a sense, there's no sense in competing head-on in things Americans do so well . . .*

JOE: Canadians have a very different view of Americans. Americans like Canadians and think of them in a good way.

MARK: *Sure, the way you think of your neighborhood cocker spaniel in a good way.*

JOE: No, no, no. Americans have a positive image of Canadians as the stereotypical .

BERNIE: Outdoorsman

MARK: *Mountie riding a buffalo.*

JOE: Those guys from SCTV . . . ?

BERNIE: Bob and Doug McKenzie.

JOE: McKenzie Brothers. That's the American view of Canadians. It's freezing up here and you hunt beavers and that's about it. *(Laughter.)* They think of Canada as a joke with no army and the U.S. is their defense and they're no threat or anything and they're just fun-loving people

MARK: *I hasten to point out that Canada was in World War II for three years before the Americans were.*

PAT: And we're secretly planning to take over the U.S.

BERNIE: SSSSSHHHH!

JOE: Canadians, on the other hand, look at Americans and think of them much like the Europeans do.

BERNIE: A lot of jealousy there.

JOE: Americans as capitalistic and money-grubbing and trying to get ahead.

BERNIE: Yeah, but those are very vague stereotypes.

MARK: *Do you find anti-Americanism in Canada?*

JOE: Sure. It's much more obvious than any anti-Canadianism I've ever noticed in the States. I've never even encountered it. We never even talked about Canada.

MARK: *Well, that's just it. There's the key. The perception of America from Canada is that it's a culture that looks in at itself.*

JOE: It's not that I hate Canada. It's those bastards at customs who go through your stuff and they damage it.

MARK: *I read an article in a U.S. student paper by some guys from Oregon who came up to visit Canada, and they said something to the effect of: Canada's a wonderful country where everybody lives at peace and they've abolished war and racism, so they've focussed all their natural hostility into their customs officials. (Laughter.)*

PAT: Yeah, they're definitely worse than the States

MARK: *These guys aren't* allowed *to be friendly. The U.S. guys, too. It's just a rule. Bureaucratic hostility. Or indifference.*

JOE: I think they could all stay home tomorrow and not go to their jobs and nobody would miss them.

BERNIE: Especially not the drug smugglers.

MARK: *Everybody knows that in Quebec you can drive across the border in about eighteen different places and no one will ever know it.*

JOE: Every time I cross that border I get

"My tastes in comics are . . . I love the 'hero' thing."

More from THE DEVIL INSIDE Grendel graphic novel.

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intimidated and I break into a sweat

MARK: *Even though you're not doing anything?*

JOE: Exactly. It's like walking around a store with books in your arms and you feel like you're stealing them

MARK: *Well, you're not just living in Canada, you're also living in Quebec where we've got this whole French language question. How does that seem to you?*

JOE: I'm not really that aware of it, because I don't get out all that much, and I have no friends here except for Bernie. I've got acquaintances . . .

(Patrick begins to play a sad tune on his air violin.)

JOE: Stop it! I don't get out much at all. I only moved up here to be with my girlfriend. So I see her and I see Bernie all the time, and that's about it.

Let's talk about comics!

MARK: *That's what I was trying to get back to with what I was saying about Canada. The basic theme of Canadian literature, which is different from American literature . . .*

BERNIE: Here it comes!

MARK: *. . . is that Canadian literature focusses on* survival, *as opposed to winning. American books are always about people* winning, *people who beat the odds.*

JOE: It's because of the climate. It's a survival mentality here. Anyway, I think we should talk about THE JAM now.

MARK: *Yes, THE JAM! Bernie did a wonderful comic which jumped from Matrix to Comico and back to Matrix, then back to Comico* again. Now *it's going to be a regular book from Slave Labor Graphics.*

BERNIE: It's been dropped more times . . .

MARK: *It was never* dropped.

BERNIE: Well, the boats it was on . . . sank.

MARK: *Where did THE JAM come from?*

BERNIE: Well, I got really excited by **Frank Miller** and **Klaus Janson's** DAREDEVIL. My tastes in comics are . . . I love the hero thing. I have a tremendous amount of nostalgia for **Jack Kirby** superheroes and colorful, bold images and six-panel pages.

JOE: Six-panel pages?

BERNIE: Six-panel pages. THE JAM is just a manifestation of all this nostalgia. He's a costume hero, he's like a cross between Tintin and Superman. I'm just having a lot of fun airing my pet peeves

MARK: *You bring up Miller, you bring up Superman, you bring up . . .*

BERNIE: Mainstream influences.

MARK: *But if you read THE JAM, especially the color special from Comico, I'd be hard pressed to find them. Miller has this grim, foreboding, apocalyptic view of the world and Bernie Mireault doesn't have that view at all. Quite the opposite, in fact.*

BERNIE: I wasn't taking **Miller's** vision or his atmosphere. I was taking his brilliant storytelling techniques. And the fact that it wasn't copy-heavy and the fact that things really flow. And just making it a fun, visual kind of thing.

"I'm amazed at how much of a fun mentality I have."

HOME ON THE RANGE
I WAS 16 WHEN I GOT MY FIRST REAL JOB IN A FAST-FOOD RESTAURANT WITH A WESTERN MOTIF
AT FIRST, IT WAS ALL BUSINESS...
STRAIGHTEN THAT KERCHIEF, PARDNER!
WHERE'S YOUR NAME-TAG?
I HAD TO DO A MILLION THINGS ALL AT THE SAME TIME...
CLEANING THE PUBLIC BATHROOMS WAS THE WORST...
...AND ALL THE MANAGERS TOOK THEIR JOBS TOO SERIOUSLY...
HOW REMEMBER? YOU GREET THE CUSTOMERS WITH "HOWDY PARDNER!" AND AS THEY'RE LEAVING, YOU SAY "HAPPY TRAILS!" GOT IT?
HOW DO YOU EXPECT TO BECOME "BUCKAROO OF THE MONTH"?
CORPORATION PROPAGANDA COVERED THE WALLS OF THE EMPLOYEES' AREA...
ROY ROGERS
DALE EVANS
MANAGERS CORNER
COME A LONGER
CHILDRENS HOSPITAL
I HATED MY JOB. EVEN THE GIRLS SMELLED LIKE BARBEQUE SAUCE
WOW! UNROMANTIC...
I REBELLED BY STEALING FOOD...
THEN WE GOT A NEW, NIGHT MANAGER. A RUSSIAN WHOSE LAST NAME WAS TOO HARD TO PRONOUNCE, SO WE CALLED HIM—MR. K.

More of Joe's work, to be collected into book form as AUTOMATT.

Hidden objects in panels and this kind of stuff and just making it a kids' game to read. That's my goal.

MARK: *The third or fourth JAM story you ever did, he never even put the costume on. It wasn't an earthshaking adventure. It was just a confrontation with a rude kid who he pulled out of his snow boots. The costume's there, but you don't use it as a crutch.*

BERNIE: No. No. I spend a lot of time justifying having him put it on. Every time he does, I feel kind of silly because there I'm departing from reality. Whereas I spend all sorts of time telling about mundane things and saying "This is reality, this is real life just like you have it!" and all of a sudden there's this guy dressed up in costume for something he could do in his street clothes. I'm just having fun. I mean, the costume's orange and green! It's great!

MARK: *Let's go back a little further, let's go to MACKENZIE QUEEN. Talking about departing from reality. Naked, eight-foot-tall aliens with horns. Where did MACKENZIE QUEEN come from?*

BERNIE: It came out . . . this is awful . . . it came out of my desire to do DOCTOR STRANGE.

MARK: *Aha!*

BERNIE: In such a way that I couldn't get sued!

MARK: *Certain lawyers prick up their ears.*

BERNIE: Just thinking back on it, I'm amazed at how much of a fanboy mentality that I have. Things come out looking alternative and unique, and people say "Wow, your style's really strange!" But for me, I'm just retelling old genre stories, but with a twist on it that my personality gives me.

MARK: *I feel I should point out to the Americans in the audience that the whole title of MACKENZIE QUEEN is a pun which had nothing to do with his sexual preference.*

BERNIE: Well, **Mackenzie King,** a former prime minister of Canada, apparently consulted crystal balls on matters of national importance.

MARK: *He was into spiritualism and communed with his dog and his mother and Roosevelt after their deaths.*

PAT: *(Laughter.)* 'Nuff said.

MARK: *The funny part is, you took those Kirby influences, you named the character Gordon Kirby . . .*

BERNIE: If I have a child, ever, boy or girl, it's going to be named Kirby if I have anything to say about it.

JOE: The **Hernandez Brothers** I think are Bernie's other big influence.

BERNIE: Of course.

MARK: *But again, some people with Hernandez influences just draw bad LOVE & ROCKETS stories. Bernie doesn't do that.*

BERNIE: The **Hernandez Brothers** have a real dynamic sense of black and white which directly influences me. I'll put black in this area because I like what the **Hernandez Brothers** have done with their really heavy blacks. Same with **John Totleben.** I ink a lot directly from his style because what he did affected me so much. So loving and craftsmanship-heavy. I like **Charles Burns** for the same reasons. **Klaus Janson** for his expressionistic inkwork. I can't help it, these things affect me. I just see it and it's absorbed in the first two seconds that I'm looking at it.

MARK: *That's why I hate you so much. You have a unity of vision. You can visualize the story, . you can sit down and draw it and it's there, completely. You do everything, the story, the pencils, the inks, the lettering . . .*

BERNIE: That's the key to happiness. You don't have to depend on anybody. You're totally self-sufficient if you do everything. And that's the way to go.

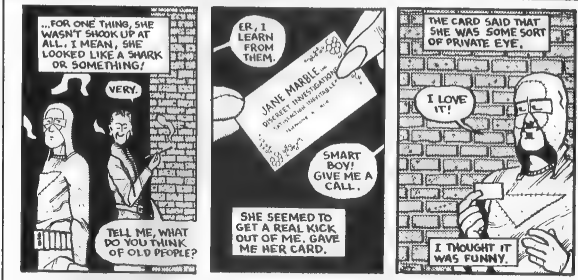
MARK: *He says.*

PAT: Authoritatively.

JOE: People should do their own lettering and everything.

BERNIE: Yeah, there's so much you can

"A dog fight in the center of a girlie mag. Right away


..FOR ONE THING, SHE WASN'T SHOOK UP AT ALL. I MEAN, SHE LOOKED LIKE A SHARK OR SOMETHING!
VERY.
TELL ME, WHAT DO YOU THINK OF OLD PEOPLE?
ER, I LEARN FROM THEM.
JANE MARBLE — PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR
SMART BOY! GIVE ME A CALL.
SHE SEEMED TO GET A REAL KICK OUT OF ME. GAVE ME HER CARD.
THE CARD SAID THAT SHE WAS SOME SORT OF PRIVATE EYE.
I LOVE IT!
I THOUGHT IT WAS FUNNY.

Here and below, work from THE JAM #1.

do with lettering.

MARK: *Yes and no. Some people just can't letter for their lives.*

JOE: Everyone can learn, I think.

PAT: I think some letterers might take offense to that.

MARK: *Okay, let's put all the letterers out of work!*

JOE: There's always going to be Marvel and DC to work for.

MARK: *Will there? I question that. Ten or fifteen years from now I don't think the comic market as we know it will be recognizable.*

JOE: You're always going to have that huge mass of people who never outgrow the Marvel/ DC superhero mentality. It's their only dream to work for them. I think they'll always be around.

MARK: *During the 50s the superheroes died out almost completely. For seven or eight years there were virtually no superheroes.*

BERNIE: And it was EC

MARK: *The horror, the war. People really didn't want superheroes in the early 50s. They weren't in tune with the times.*

JOE: Romance was big, until Marvel's resurgence in the early 60s.

MARK: *Which tied into Kennedy and the space program. There were* real *heroes again . . .*

JOE: Basically my mentality is that I'm trying to do something underground but without any drug influences or any of the other shit that blurred their vision.

MARK: *That wasn't just a problem of the undergrounds, it was the counter-culture as a whole. They tried to have their cake and eat it, too.*

MARK: *Pat, GRENDEL is going to be your first work for a major publisher in color. How do you approach it? Do you approach it any differently than the work you did in black and white?*

JOE: Who's inking you?

PAT: Well, this is one of the things that's not sure yet, and I'm a bit nervous about it. We haven't even confirmed an inker. Or a letterer for that matter. Hopefully **Jim Somerville** will be inking my stuff. He worked for Arcel as well. He's currently doing a book called THE WALKING DEAD which is a really . . . the artwork is really fine. I don't know about the writing. Yeah, I'm a bit nervous. My first foray into the mainstream.

JOE: I can't even describe the look of your stuff. It looks kind of ROAD WARRIORish.

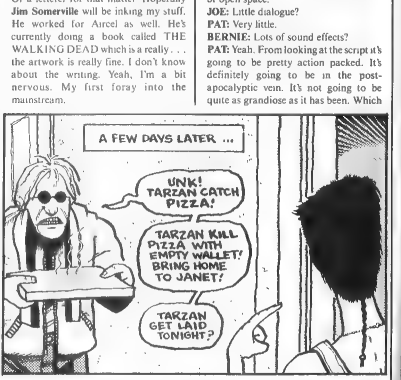
PAT: Yeah, well Matt wants something between THE ROAD WARRIOR and LONE WOLF AND CUB, which is fine by me. When we met, we were both in a mindframe where we wanted to do minimal panels on a page and a sort of zen art thing where there's a fair amount of open space.

JOE: Little dialogue?

PAT: Very little.

BERNIE: Lots of sound effects?

PAT: Yeah. From looking at the script it's going to be pretty action packed. It's definitely going to be in the post-apocalyptic vein. It's not going to be quite as grandiose as it has been. Which



I know that I know nothing about Japanese culture."

is fine by me.

BERNIE: All the issues that have gone before, though, they've built up background that your issues rest on. You can pull from all that.

PAT: It's going to be a little bit difficult to put a personal edge on something that's so established.

MARK: *But the point about GRENDEL is that it's always changing, even from the Pander Brothers to Bernie to John K. Snyder.*

JOE: Readers are afraid to jump on it because of all that history behind it. They're afraid to jump on a new art team because they don't recognize the characters.

PAT: The upcoming storyline, I think you're going to be able to jump into it, because there's a certain amount of time that's passed.

MARK: *The same thing's been true of CEREBUS. People were afraid to jump into it because it's been going on so long.*

JOE: Like CEREBUS, I think Matt's basically doing a series of graphic novels that are being released a chapter at a time.

MARK: *That's the way North American comics are going now. Just as the Europeans are getting away from serializing comics in magazines and then reprinting them as graphic albums, we've sort of just discovered the process.*

PAT: The European magazines are folding now. The best one's the American reprint one.

BERNIE: COMICS USA?

PAT: Yeah. it sells quite well.

MARK: *And they mostly reprint stuff from Kitchen Sink.*

BERNIE: Yeah, every issue has a big babe on the cover.

MARK: *That's the problem. Gary Groth once said that American comics have the superhero stuff and European comics have the cheap porno. Europe isn't the holy land we make it out to be sometimes.*

PAT: The same with Japan.

MARK: *The funny thing about the Japanese porno comics, I've seen some of them in French translation, they leave the genitalia* invisible. *They just don't draw them. It's a very strange cultural phenomenon. It's not that the Japanese are prudish, it's just some strange law they have.*

BERNIE: Once I was looking in a Japanese bookshop and I was looking through some Japanese comics. Right next to them was a Japanese equivalent of PLAYBOY, with a young girl on the cover who was made to look as young as possible, ponytails and she's sitting on a bicycle. Apparently that's very big over there. And I was thumbing through it like . . . like . . . just because, and I come to the centerfold and I figure "Ah, here comes another girl on a bicycle," I open it up, and it's a *dog fight*. With both dogs in a horrible state, bleeding and everything.

MARK: *What?*

BERNIE: A *dog fight* in the centerfold of a girlie magazine. Right away I know that I know absolutely *nothing* about Japanese culture.

MARK: *Getting back to GRENDEL. Bernie's working on a new GRENDEL story.*

BERNIE: One of the future GRENDEL projects is going to be a black, white and red graphic novel. Matt says at this point he's thinking of it as a six-issue miniseries. I've already done my story.

JOE: Mini-series? I thought it was going to be one big book.

BERNIE: That's just the last I heard. I'm sure it could change. I did a ten-page story right away just before Comico went through their financial thrash. THE JAM was dropped and everything and it was the last check. Even though it wasn't going to be printed right away I still managed to be paid for it. Which helped. It's one of the best things I've done lately. It's really weird and different and a departure from normal working conditions for me. I did layouts for this real quick, and I liked the initial pencil drawings I did so much, trying to recapture them drove me crazy. So I just had the darn things blown up, and I light-tabled them all. Right off the rough, sketchy layout. And I think it worked real well. But now, the project is sort of in limbo, and it kills me to have a story done and locked away from the public sight. I hear **Art Suydam** has two complete MUDWOG novels . . .

JOE: Or something. I hear he also did a MARTIAN MANHUNTER for DC.

BERNIE: MARTIAN MANHUNTER?! If **Art Suydam** has done something, I want to see it! These publishers are sitting on their asses on top of the work, hiding it from us, essentially. It's a sin!

JOE: To get back to the black, white and red thing.

MARK: *Yeah?*

JOE: I've laid out a story that I want to do for it, a five-pager. If **Matt Wagner** gives me the go-ahead, it would be the first humorous GRENDEL story.

MARK: *A Joe Matt GRENDEL story.*

JOE: It's already laid out. Real Kurtzman influence.

BERNIE: What's it called?

JOE: "Devilled Ham." It's about a huge fat guy who's a GRENDEL fanatic who puts on a costume and runs around. There's a close-up of him where he says, "I am directed. I am hungry. I am GRENDEL." And through that progression he pulls out a little fork and approaches a buffet table.

BERNIE: *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *I love it.*

JOE: There's also the BATMAN/GRENDEL project. I'll be coloring that.

BERNIE: I've seen the artwork and it's his best ever.

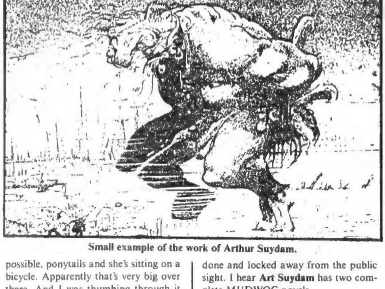
MARK: *It's the Hunter Rose version of GRENDEL?*

BERNIE: Yes.

MARK: *That's great. The parallel.*

BERNIE: He plays that a lot. He plays that like a violin.

JOE: Like a banjo!



©1990 Arthur Suydam

Small example of the work of Arthur Suydam.

LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

COMIC BAGS ARE TRASH

Why is the Comic Prince Bookstore no longer supplying bags and boards for all new comics? In a competitive marketplace why risk an unpopular position when the short term costs are so low?

Our reasons are that, in the long term, the costs for freely distributing plastic bags and cardboard sheets are very high both economically and environmentally.

Why do we use plastic bags on comic books? The reason is to keep dust and dirty fingers from spoiling the covers and devaluing the comic. As a comic store we must keep our older issues in plastic bags to keep them in good condition from being handled by so many people. How many collectors allow people to freely go through their comic collections?

With this understanding that the plastic bag is to keep dirty hands off it must now be pointed out that this same plastic bag must be changed at least every two years to prevent it from damaging the comic book that it is protecting! The acids produced by the decomposing plastic are very harmful to paper. You can notice this for yourself if you have ever taken a comic from a bag that it has been in for some time.

Hold the plastic up to a light. You will see an obvious discoloring — a brown or yellow clouding of the normal clearness. If you look closely you will even notice that the discoloring conforms to the shape of the comic. This is a very real indication of the chemical interaction going on between the paper and inks of the comic book and the plastics used in making the bag.

Even if you should choose to upgrade the type of plastic bag you are using from polyethylene (the most common) to polypropylene or mylar you are still advised to change the bag frequently. If you choose not to, your comic book will deteriorate more and be worth less than if you had not kept it in a bag at all. And, should your comic collection be kept in a warm location or under direct sunlight, this deterioration is speeded up even more.

Greenhouses use polyethylene plastic to cover them because it retains heat and magnifies the effect of the light. Plants adore this, but heat and light are two of the worst elements for preserving paper.

So now you are compelled to keep buying and changing bags at least every other year. What do you do with your old plastics? Throw them out?

It will take almost two hundred years for polyethylene or polypropylene to degrade into usable compounds in soil. This is why these types of plastics are exactly the same as those used in water and gas pipes. They last so long, which is great for piping systems but terrible as trash.

The Comic Prince Bookstore no longer wishes to contribute to this ecological time bomb.

There are certainly comics that should be kept in plastic bags. These are comics which need protection to keep their covers (and value) intact. But new comics stored properly do not.

As for cardboard backings — trees are a renewable resource if used wisely. If paper products must be rationed to protect the forests, then let us use the paper for comic books or baseball cards and not as storing materials which must be changed again frequently.

Now, for a new solution — a method of storing comic books so that they retain their optimum value and we do not contribute to the wholesale wasting of our planet. Store your comics upright in a comic box. Alternate your books so that some face the front and some face the back — this will keep the spines from warping. Do it in groups of 10 and your comics will stay as straight as if you had used a board.

Keep the lid on the box. This will keep out the dust. Store the box in a cool, dry and dark location. Try a closet or under a bed, not the basement unless you have a dehumidifier.

Do not eat chocolate or pistachios while looking through your PUNISHER back issues.

To further our commitment to preserving the environment, the Comic Prince Bookstore will rebate 10¢ for anyone who recycles their carrying bag. In other words, if you don't need a bag to put your purchase in we will knock a dime off your total.

So much green has been altered in greed. Some irrevocably. But not all. At least not yet. Look around you — it's the products we need, not the packagings. We make the choices. Remember the three R's — Reduce, Reuse and Recycle.

Gary M. Supp, proprietor
Cómic Prince Bookstore
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FALSE ADVERTISING?

Dear COMICS INTERVIEW,

Recently I have noticed that some people have decided to become fan bashers. These are the people who say fans are narrow minded for wanting continuity in comic books. Well, there is a reason I want continuity. I consider each issue of a title to be one chapter in an ever-continuing book. If one of these chapters differs from the rest, then the book doesn't make any sense. It would be like reading a novel where one of the chapters changes all of the characters and you are expected to understand what's going on.

When a company does not say that an issue is not part of normal continuity, then readers become confused. A perfect example presents itself in the form of SOLARMAN #2 and MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS #48. In the MARVEL PRESENTS issue there is a story involving Storm and Doctor Doom. In SOLARMAN the hero battles Doctor Doom. The Dr. Doom in the Storm story battles to save a forest from a factor that produces acid rain, but in the Solarman story, Dr. Doom burns off the ozone layer. Save the forest from acid rain, but destroy the *world* with an absent ozone.

ARKHAM ASYLUM is another example. A good story, but not exactly in the continuity of the current DC Universe. I thought I was buying something other than what I got. Does this border on false advertising?

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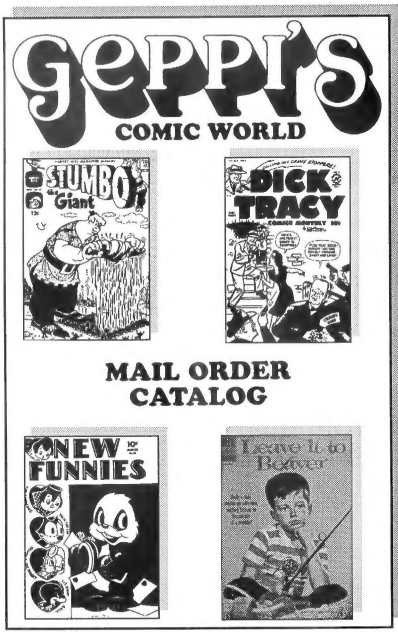

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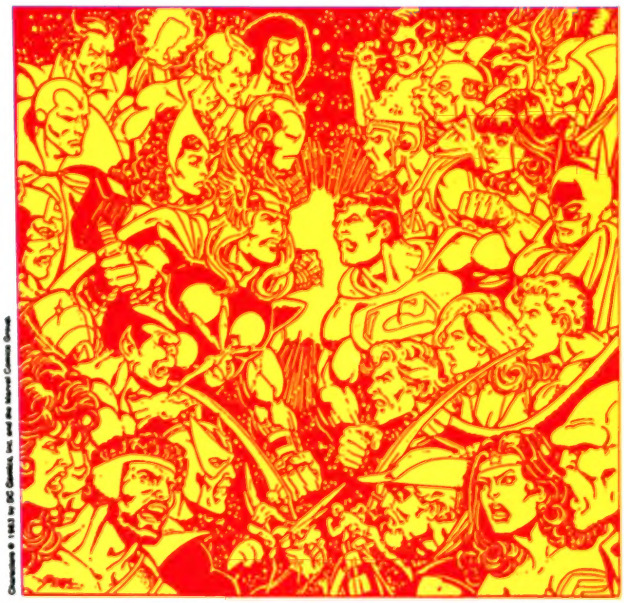

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